JOHN F. AUTRY

THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN

WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES, INDEXES, ETC., ETC.

By VARIOUS AUTHORS

In Twenty-One Volumes

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
NEW YORK AND LONDON

A HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF

LAMENTATIONS

BY THE

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FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

NEW YORK AND LONDON

Printed in the United States

PREFACE.

PREACHERS appear to have shunned the BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS, as if it lacked suggestiveness for homiletic purposes; and there are comparatively few sermons based on texts selected from this portion of Holy Writ. It may be that the undertone of melancholy, that runs so sadly through the five elegies of which the book is composed, has created the impression that the theme is too monotonous to admit of the freshness and variety expected from the pulpit of the present day. A little patient study of the book in detail will correct that impression. The predominating subject is indeed a story of desolation and sorrow; but it is told with a marvellous versatility of poetic imagery and with exquisite pathos.

The LAMENTATIONS are more than the lamentations of Jeremiah—more than the lamentations of the Jews, who were the immediate and principal sufferers in the disasters narrated: they are typical of a sorrow that is as universal as humanity. Individuals or nations, brooding over conscious unfaithfulness and sin, and smitten with the conviction that the misery in which they are whelmed is the just and bitter fruit of their own reckless disobedience, will find in the Lamentations, as they cannot elsewhere, the most appropriate words in which to voice their grief. We cannot conceive of any possible phase of human misery that may not be fittingly expressed in some portion of this remarkable book, and that will not find some relief in being thus expressed. Trouble fills a large space in our experience of life, and the homilete will find in the study of this tragic poem the many varied forms in which the sufferer may give utterance to his distress, whether in an individual or a collective capacity.

This Commentary contains 161 outlines, brief or more extended, of which 136 are original: the remaining 25 bear the names of their respective authors.

The comprehensive and lucid INTRODUCTION to this work is written by the Rev. D. G. WATT, M.A. The *Exegetical Notes* at the head of each chapter are also supplied by the same writer, and will be found not only a faithful exposition of the text, but also, if studied in connection with each homiletic paragraph, a suggestive help to the thoughtful sermoniser.

Great care has been exercised in the selection of the 262 ILLUSTRATIONS, and it is believed that these will be regarded as not the least valuable feature in the Commentary.

The BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS is not the poem of despair. There is nothing more dismally depressing than the monotone of unmitigated grief. Throughout the eloquent wail of the Poet-Prophet the spiritualised ear detects the recurring notes of a growing hope—timidly expressed at first, but gradually gaining strength and confidence. The darkest period is not without shimmerings of coming light. The morning of rescue dawns: despair gives place to hope, and defeat is followed with the joy of triumph.

GEO. BARLOW.

KENDAL, *July* 1891.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

THE LAMENTATIONS.

INTRODUCTION.

Name.—All literatures—Hebrew, English, and the rest—bear witness to the forces with which sorrowful emotions press for utterance. Hence comes the ancient and widespread custom of making public recognition of the decease of famous or beloved persons; of the disasters of cities and countries. Speeches or orations more or less eloquent, poems more or less deep-toned, are handed along the centuries, and remind the readers that man's state in every land is shadowed by clouds of dark and mournful hue. The Hebrew people were exposed to many such sad and sunless times, perhaps more awful than have overtaken any other people, and the "almost unalloyed expression of unrestrained anguish and utter inconsolable desolation" given by this book may be taken as proof thereof. No wonder that it is commonly called "*The Lamentations.*" It is not classified in ordinary Hebrew Bibles by this term. There it is denominated Aicah, the Hebrew equivalent to "How," which is the first word of the book. Rabbinical writers have styled it Qinoth. That is the word which denotes the ode composed by David on the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. i. 17), as also similar compositions elsewhere in the Old Testament. It is also employed in 2 Chron. xxxv. 25, where it is recorded, *And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations* (qinoth) *unto this day; and they made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold they are written in the lamentations* (qinoth). Some expositors hold that the five elegies collected in this book are those lamentations on Josiah's death. Others, seeing the unlikelihood of this, aver that the fourth chapter is identical with the dirges of Jeremiah. Against this stands the fact that that event, instead of being the refrain of the elegy, receives but the slightest allusion, if it is an allusion at all (chap. iv. 20). It seems more reasonable to suppose that the lamentations of the prophet and singers over Josiah's death have not been transmitted to us, as other portions of ancient Hebrew literature have not. For, assuredly, the references of this elegiac collection are to casualties far more painful and depressing than the removal of the noblest of kings, and truly fit to give the name to this book during succeeding centuries.

Form.—The book is poetical and unusually technical in its framework. In other Biblical poetical books the usual division into chapters and verses is not always made according to the structure, and sometimes even breaks into the sense of a passage. In Lamentations there are no untoward separations. Its five chapters are five distinct odes or elegies, and each ode is divided into twenty-two parts

regulated by the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the verses of the first four chapters following, on the whole, the order of the alphabet. Thus:—

Chap. i. Each verse, while beginning with a word which has a letter of the alphabet in its grammatical order, is constituted of three double clauses.

Chap. ii. Constructed similarly to chap i., except that the letter seventeenth in the normal order is placed before the sixteenth—a course which is kept up in the two succeeding chapters.

Chap. iii. Differs from the two preceding in having three double clauses, each of which is made a verse in our English versions, beginning with the same letter of the alphabet.

Chap. iv. Takes a structure like that of chap. ii., with the exception of having only two double clauses in every verse.

Chap. v. Is divided as the others into twenty-two verses, but the verses do not put their initial words in the order of the alphabet.

No satisfactory explanation has been suggested for the variation of the order of the alphabet in chapters ii., iii., and iv. Difference from that order is found also in Psalms xxxiv. and cxlv.

The technicality or artificiality of the form is plain. And it is as plain that it would be next to impossible to present that formal structure in a translation, and at the same time do justice to the original. Merely as an illustration of the *form* of the book, the first two verses of chapter iii. are appended:—

1. Affliction, by the rod of His wrath, I am the man that hath seen.
   And He hath led me, caused me to walk in darkness, not in light.
   Against me surely He turneth His hand, again and again all the day.

2. Broken my bones hath He, and made old my flesh and skin.
   Builded against me hath He, and compassed me with gall and travail.
   By dark places hath He made me to dwell, as those that have been ever dead.

Certain suggestions made to account for this technical form are hardly to be entertained, *e.g.*, that it is a sign of a simulated grief: a product of later and degenerated taste or of a declining art: the resource of a poet who is inferior in spiritual feeling: a means of joining in sentences thoughts which are only loosely related to each other. Is it not rather the token that a grief, which had benumbed the faculty of expression, has passed the emotional stage and begins to traverse the reflective? There, in the effort to express itself in a peculiar form, it finds a counteractive to its masterful depression. Why should we ascribe this to unreal emotion, or to decadence of art, or to inferiority of faculty, any more than we should ascribe the peculiar form of "In Memoriam" to either of these influences? May not the intensest feelings find utterance in an elegy which employs the order of an alphabet in the beginning of its lines, as well as in an ode of Horace which uses long and short syllables in unvarying succession, or as in a sonnet of Shakspere employing words of the same sound at the end of certain lines? Surely a deep sorrow can find a distraction in putting its phases into special verbal form, whether that form shows itself at the end of lines, as in English, or all through the lines, as in Latin, or at the beginning of lines, as in this and other specimens of Hebrew literature. "Tersely and vividly, thought after thought shaped itself round each letter of the alphabet in order, while in the effort the writer found relief for his anguish."

Contents.—The Jewish historian Josephus makes the statement that "Jeremiah composed a dirge for Josiah's funeral, which remains unto this day." Does this prove that he identified that dirge with this series of dirges? It is, to say the least, doubtful. If it is a valid proof, there can be little hesitation in regarding Josephus as mistaken. Each chapter of the Lamentations might be adduced in evidence that it was penned under the pressure of grief, not for a deceased sovereign, but for a prostrated kingdom—for an utterly ruined metropolis; for the

covenant people disgraced, outraged, captives, in despair. Again and again are the wretched conditions sketched in the most sombre colours, and, to the eyes of a distant age, with a sort of monotony tending to irksomeness. For "sorrow is distasteful to those who are not suffering it." A cursory glance at the several chapters is all that is needed here.

In the *first* the lamentation is chiefly over the desolated city, and the people plundered, starved, and carried into captivity amid the taunts and brutality of the enemy.

In the *second* it is the wrath of Jehovah, taking vengeance upon the persistent sins of His people, which is depicted. Herein the sweeping away of means of worship, the terrible anguish of men and women, mothers and their little children, the hopelessness of all human effort, and the imperious need of pleading the mercy of the Lord, are pourtrayed.

In the *third* the form of the subject-matter is diverse from that of the other chapters. A thoughtful reader will notice a characteristic feature, the bearing of which he will desire to understand. It is that the writer seems to speak largely of his own personal experiences, occasionally sinking his own under those of others. He begins with the outburst, *I am the man that has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath*, and continues in the same manner to the verge of despair. Then, as in a more illustrious case, he realises that when he is weak he is really strong, and for a moment there is hope, and a vision of a wider area: *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.* His own case is again referred to (ver. 24), only, however, as a momentary step towards embracing the Israel of God who trust on Him (vers. 25–39). Here the impersonal is left, and again (vers. 40–47) the associated community makes known its aims and hardships: *Let us search and try our ways.* Once more, to the end of the chapter, it is the individual who laments and implores recompense. How is this interchange of persons to be accounted for, here as also in certain portions of other poetical parts of the Scriptures? Assuredly by the supposition that the consciousness of the writer testifies to him that his sufferings are representative of his nation's sufferings, or, as Cheyne says, "of those of the pious believers who formed the kernel of the Israelitish people." Accepting this representativeness, we perceive why the expressions of sadness and dismay are such as go beyond mere individual experience, or are such as can be predicted only of an individual who felt as if the whole burden of the tribulation was laid upon himself. It is ever thus with hearts that are sensitive to the visitations of trouble which they share in common with others, and it becomes hard to distinguish the personal from the collective sorrows and pains.

In the *fourth* gruesome details of the calamities which had overtaken all classes —matrons and young children, princes and nobles, prophets and priests—are outlined: outlines which show the hand of an eyewitness. It concludes with an appeal to and a denunciation of Edom, the age-long, bitter adversary of Judah.

The *fifth* begins with a prayer, and then proceeds to draw up something like a list of the errors and outrages which had characterised the national history. It closes with a hesitating call upon Jehovah to turn the people to Himself and restore their ancient glory.

From such a view of the contents Keil suggests one may "readily perceive in these poems a well-cogitated plan in the treatment of the material common to the whole, and a distinct progress in the execution of this plan." This may be open to doubts. If earlier expositors failed to affix the contents of the different elegies to the different leading features of the Chaldean invasion—the siege, the capture, the desolation of the Temple, city, and land—the attempt of Keil, or any other, also fails to make clear a definite plan and progression moulding the whole. Whatever be the connection of one chapter with another, it is the connection of a common subject rather than a connection formed by the order of thought. Besides that there seems no other clue needed to thread our way. The exposition

must be the exposition of separate poems; at any rate not of a drama with five acts, as the imagination of Ewald makes out the contents to form.

In contrast with opinions already referred to, regarding the poetical vigour of this book, that of one who cannot be ranked as a poor judge of poetry—the late Dean of St. Paul's, Milman—may be cited. In his "History of the Jews" he says, "Never was ruined city lamented in language so exquisitely pathetic. Jerusalem is, as it were, personified, and bewailed with the passionate sorrow of private and domestic attachment. While the more general pictures . . . are successively drawn with all the life and reality of an eyewitness." It may be interesting to present a specimen of the manner in which the Dean translates the original (from chap. v.).

"Remember, Lord, what hath befallen,
Look down on our reproach:
Our heritage is given to strangers,
Our home to foreigners.
Our water have we drank for money;
Our fuel hath its price.

Princes were hung up by the hand,
And age had no respect.
Young men are grinding at the mill,
Boys faint 'neath loads of wood.
The elders from the gate have ceased,
The young men from their music.

The crown is fallen from our head,
Woe! woe! that we have sinned.
'Tis therefore that our hearts are faint,
Therefore our eyes are dim,
For Zion's mountain desolate;
Foxes walk on it."

Author.—The name of no author is attached to the book, or to any of its separate elegies. In Hebrew MSS. and Bibles the book generally appears in the third division of the canonical books of the Old Testament called **K'thubim**, between Ruth and Ecclesiastes. This is no criterion as to its authorship; for "the Lamentations, as being lyrical poetry, are classed, not with prophecies, but with the Psalms and Proverbs," according to the understood arrangement of the canon by the Jews. It is an old and concurrent tradition to name the prophet Jeremiah as the sole author. This tradition is formulated by the Septuagint translator. He prefaces the book with words which are not found in any extant Hebrew MS., *And it came to pass, after Israel had been carried captive and Jerusalem was desolated, Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem and said, How,* &c. Whatever be the historical worth of this statement, the ascription to Jeremiah is backed up by Josephus and the Talmudical writers. Such testimonies have been accepted by subsequent students until a comparatively recent period. Indeed, it is only within the present century that anything like material objections have been made to the traditional belief. The gravity of these objections may be measured by the consideration that it is principally derived from the words and style of the poems. And the operations of such attempts are far from uniform. "The absence of certain specific Jeremianic peculiarities," which Schrader adduces, is counterbalanced by his own acknowledgment of its affinity in contents, spirit, tone, and language with Jeremiah's prophecies. Keil represents Naegelsbach, in Lange's series, as having, "with the help of the concordance, prepared a table of those words and forms of words found in Lamentations, but not occurring in the prophecies of Jeremiah," and so concluding against the authorship of the prophet. On the other hand, Dr. Hornblower, translator of Naegelsbach, and Keil present the evidence of passages

in contradiction of Naegelsbach's conclusion. Attributing the book to Ezekiel may be looked on as an exhibition of ingenuity and not of convincing effect. Besides this, there is extreme diversity of opinion regarding the composition of the separate odes. Ewald maintains that "every competent judge will ascribe [these five poems] to only one poet." Thenius assures us that chaps. ii. and iv. are "undeniably from Jeremiah," chaps. i. and iii. from some unknown resident in Judæa, and chap. v. from the leader of a band of wanderers seeking an asylum. Cheyne is sure that the first, second, and fourth chapters are not the productions of Jeremiah; that the third chapter is by a different author from these, probably by one who was acquainted with Jeremiah's prophecies; and the fifth chapter "very certainly not by the author of any of the foregoing Lamentations," though he regards it as probable that "Jeremiah was the favourite book of these poets (next to the Psalter, so far as this book was in existence)."

To pronouncements on such precarious evidence there can be but one fair attitude—that of suspense, until more definite contingents than those represented by words and style are forthcoming. For this sort of evidence is by no means conclusive either for or against the genuineness of any writings. It may or may not be important, as it is related to other conditions. It may betoken different authors, or it may be the same author in altered circumstances of thought and life. His age, new events, the limitations of his subject, his purpose in writing—each one of these will be a modifying element in his choice and allocation of words. It is therefore unwise and hazardous to assert positively whether Jeremiah was the author or not, unless we can decide, approximately at any rate, how he and his style would be affected by the points just referred to. This has not been done, and, until something of this kind is done, the tradition that Jeremiah is the author of all or chief part of the Lamentations is entitled to preference. It is indeed little matter who the writer or writers might be when they are moved by the Spirit of God.

There is one topic yet unnoticed which may be a difficulty in the way of accepting the traditional belief, and it is raised by that artificial *form* of the Lamentations already described. Could that form have been given them so close to the occurrence of the fearful calamities as Jeremiah must have been? Could he, with his intense sensitiveness to the sins and miseries of his fellow-countrymen, have sat, as tradition reports, among the ruinous heaps of Jerusalem, and, in sight of the fiery ordeal through which his ill-treated people were passing, busied himself with the technicalities of poetic art? Must not the condition for the composition of such poems be not that of perturbation but of reflectiveness? Are not the mitigations of time requisite, has not the emotion already parted with its overwhelming vehemence, before downcast men will care to express their grief in peculiar forms? "We are recovering from love or grief or any other passion when we are able to rhyme on it with elegance" (*Daily News*, in review of "Poems of Afghanistan"). This may be true; but there is another view. In poignant trouble a short time may appear long, and the words, *Wherefore dost thou forsake us so long time?* (ch. v. 20), are not so decisive as to settle the question whether a longer or shorter period had intervened between the desolation of Jerusalem and the production of the elegies. "We should count time by heart-throbs." In reference to this Cheyne quotes from "The Dream of Gerontius":—

> ". . . time is not a common property;
> But what is long is short, and swift is slow,
> And near is distant as received and grasped
> By this mind and by that, and every one
> Is standard of his own chronology."

Thus the element of time brings no ingredient to solve the riddle of authorship. It cannot eliminate the claim of Jeremiah. He could have written the five poems

so far as his intense sorrow was concerned. There is much force in a remark made by Riehm: "In lyric poetry proper the employment of this artificial form is naturally and intrinsically justified only when a single fundamental strain, that fills the whole soul of the poet,—deep, strong, and sustained—seeks to die away in many different forms of chords."

Date.—There is no chronological record as to the time of composition except that which is involved in the fact that the awfulness of the desolation was fresh in the writer's mind. And if he was not Jeremiah, he, or they who wrote, may be supposed to have written under the impulse of "a great lyric movement," which Ewald conceives took place "among the conquered Jews, as well those in Babylon as those who remained in their much-loved home." And he believes the Lamentations came into their existing form coincident with that movement. But beyond all such considerations it is to be remembered that the thought which the writer or writers wanted to present was in no sense dependent on a date.

The structure and contents of the Lamentations are seen to be unique. No one of the collection of documents containing record of the unfolding of God's will to His servants during centuries can be compared with it. It makes infinitesimal additions to history, and contributes next to nothing to dogmatics. It is at the apex of the literature of sorrow, and reverberates with the thought that sins against the living holy Lord bring condign punishment. The diverse peculiarities suggest two questions which are not irrelevant, and may be considered briefly.

1. Why should a composition, so obviously technical, be a factor in the revelation of God and His will? Or it may be put thus, Why should *holy men of God, moved by the Holy Spirit*, trammel or order their emotions by the demands of an alphabet and metre? It was an old Greek and Roman belief that, "When the gods spoke they spoke in verse" (*Hatch*). Why should not the only true God make use of men who were born poets? If the susceptibility to, and expression in poetic forms be an endowment He has bestowed; if there are abounding materials in nature and the life of humanity fitted for such forms; if the rudest tribes and the most cultured nations appreciate them, as affecting the mind for good and evil, for pleasure and pain, is it to be credited that He who made all these capacities will refuse to employ them as a vehicle for the transmission of the sublime truths of eternal righteousness and love? Surely the presentation of the data requisite to poetic form will solve the question propounded.

Moreover, poetry, with its measured rhythm, is more likely to be remembered than prosaic expression. With reference especially to the Jewish people it has been said, "The obvious advantages of the poetic style and of a metrical structure are—the adaptation of both to the tastes and culture of the people; and especially the adaptation of the latter to the purpose of storing those compositions in the memory from infancy upward. Thus it was that the minds of this—indeed favoured though afflicted—people were richly furnished with religious and moral sentiments, and thus was meditative thought nourished and suggested and directed, and was made conducive to the momentous purposes of the individual and of the domestic spiritual life. Too little do we now take account, in our Biblical readings and criticisms, of this deep-going purpose of Hebrew poetic Scriptures which, through centuries of national weal and woe, have nourished millions on millions of souls 'unto life eternal.'" (*Isaac Taylor.*)

2. Cheyne remarks, "We cannot fail to see in this short elegaic book that peculiar quality which, in all its degrees of manifestation, the Jewish Doctors agree with us in describing as inspiration." Granted. But are not inspiration and the limitations of an alphabet and definite numbers mutually exclusive, or restrictive at least? Was the soul of an inspired man but "as a flute through which the breath of God flowed in Divine music"? Or had that soul power over itself, and, as a boat whose sails are filled with a breeze, could take any course except dead against the breath of God? Various solutions of the perplexity have been

attempted, but no one altogether satisfactory has been formulated, and the discussions still carried on prove that the premises for sufficient conclusions are yet unsettled. It would help to the acquisition of such premises if, on all sides, preconceived ideas of inspiration were resolutely thrown off, and the somewhat obscure indications in the Bible itself were cleared up and harmonised so far as could be. How did the Lord *speak* to men of old? How was it that a prophet could know that it was His *word which was in his heart, as it were a burning fire shut up in his bones?* What is it to *speak from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit?* What are the criteria of being *in the Spirit?* Such inquiries suggest further questions. Was the realm of inspiration by the Spirit of the Lord so closely interlinked with the region of His operations in the new birth that it could not be known whence the afflatus came or whither it went? If a prophet was speaking in the old Church of Corinth, and one sitting by the speaker *had a revelation*, what was it which enabled *the others* to discriminate that a fresh inspiration had been vouchsafed and the first speaker was to *keep silence?* Is that discriminating power withdrawn wholly? Are there not subtle tokens by which a man in Christ even now may discern inspiration in himself and in another brother? The answer to those inquiries may never be definite, there is so much unknown, but qualified research and devout patience may be taught, as God will, to see some undetected aspects of inspiration, even if it be impossible to embrace in one formula all the facts. So we may need to rest contented with the truth that to one member of the body of Christ is given *the discerning of spirits in the one Spirit*, but also be convinced that there is a wider range in which *he that is spiritual judgeth all the things of the Spirit of God.* In that conviction we may feel that the "quality" of inspiration is present throughout the technical construction of the Lamentations, as also we can find *in the form of a servant, Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden.*

Purport.—The elegies issue out of the preceding history of the Jewish people, and thus stand related to other portions of the sacred Scriptures, even if the points of contact appear to us under a haze. They are resonant with chords formed by the claims of God, who *makes judgment the line and righteousness the plummet* in His dealings with men. They signify that moral decadence is in closest alliance with religious compromises; that rueful calamities seize on a nation which swerves from its normal position; that if a people favoured by God, Creator and King, stand in the way of the knowledge of His saving health among all nations, down that people must go, no matter what it has been in His procedure hitherto. This result would be promoted by the repetitions of ideas and even expressions which are frequent throughout the book. Such a feature certainly detracts from its literary finish, but we must suppose that the author did not give heed to that. He might have managed to improve its symmetry if he had tried. Obviously he did not try. He had an end in view, which a finished literary form would not have brought him to so well as the redundant form he has adopted. And, if we dare define what his aim was, we should say that he wanted to portray an impressive picture of a country, people, worship, God-forsaken because God-forsaking. The unusual structure of the book also would tend to deepen this impression. Thus an enduring symbol was erected of that long course of scatterings and wanderings, of insults and oppressions, which was to be trod by the Jewish tribes. At any rate the Great Revealer was opening up, by these outbursts of grief, some fresh aspect of His character and purpose; intimating that He had brought to a further stage the discipline and development of Israel, with whom He had entered into covenant, and was forging a new link, into which another link in due course would be welded, so as to extend the outstretch of that chain which should lift the world into a wider life. Then, *when the fulness of the time came*, Jesus Christ, who searched the Scriptures, as He directed others to do, found His sympathy stirred in unison with these Lamentations: *When He saw the city He*

wept over it, because its enemies should not leave one stone upon another, and because it knew not the time of its visitation.

The prophecies of Ezekiel, not a few of which must have been contemporaneous with the publication of the Lamentations, have one ever-recurring refrain, *And they shall know that I am Jehovah.* Since that was the goal towards which all the changes of that time were leading men, and as this book pointed in the same direction, we may have a valid presentiment that it helped towards the formation of the new spirit which pervaded the Jews *when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion.* They had voiced their laments here, their prayers in such a Psalm as the seventy-fourth, and then followed their praise: *The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.*

Liturgical Use.—Jewish synagogues have recognised the bearing of the Lamentations by appointing that they should be read on the anniversary day commemorating the destruction of the first and second Temple. In the Christian Church also their importance has been regarded. The Roman Catholic Church assigns three portions of the book to be read as part of the ritual of each of the three last days of Passion-week. In the German United Evangelical Church, adaptations are made for liturgical use. In the revised Prayer Book of the Episcopal Church of England, "portions are ordered to be read on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in Holy-week." The reasons for such use of these elegies may have been (1) that a homeless nation and desolated city suggested the condition of mankind far from God, and of a soul doomed to die in the bondage of sin; and (2) that the sorrows of the representative of the suffering people suggested *the Lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world*, and of whom we cannot but think as enduring a sorrow like unto no other sorrow.

What one and another portion of the Lamentations has been for the expression of emotion to the tried and troubled of many a country and age, none but God, the all-knowing, can declare. Assuredly they still will be so used, even until *the Lord Jehovah shall wipe away the tears from off all faces, and the reproach of His people shall He take away from off all the earth.*

Note.—In the translation I have generally adhered to the Revised Version I have deviated from it where I aimed to express more literally what I consider the representation of the Hebrew original. I offer no apology for always using our time-honoured word Jehovah instead of the pedantic Yahveh

D. G. W.

CHAPTER 1.

The Miseries of Jerusalem.

Exegetical Notes.—This elegy may be divided into two chief parts. The first, vers. 1–11, exhibits the mournful condition of an unnamed city, overtaken by various calamities, with a break, at vers. 9 and 11, by an ejaculatory appeal to Jehovah. The second, vers. 12–22, contains a bitter complaint from the city herself, or rather from the city personified, by a sufferer.

Vers. 1 and 2 present the city as she is in sharp contrast with what she was, and as an object of deep distress, on account of her sins and their penalties. The verses have a pictorial illustration in the medal struck by the Roman Emperor Titus in commemoration of the capture of Jerusalem (A.D. 71).

(א) Ver. 1. **How**, not in interrogation, but in surprise and pain. This particle is unnecessarily inserted twice in the Authorised Version. It is not again employed in the Hebrew of the book, except in chaps. ii. 1 and iv. 1, 2, **sitteth alone**, in a posture of overpowering sorrow rather than of utter isolation, like Nehemiah, who, when he heard of the doleful state of Jerusalem, *sat down and wept and mourned* (i. 4), **the city** = Jerusalem, as following verses prove. The fact that the Chaldean captain *left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah* (Jer. xxxix. 10) suggests that a few waifs and strays might be still hanging round the ruined city, while the reference (chap. ii. 10) to *the elders of the daughter of Zion* may intimate that some of better means were also with them; that **was full of people.** No known criterion exists by which to estimate the population of ancient Jerusalem. An approximate guess even cannot be made from the perfunctory census taken in David's reign. **She is become as a widow**, forsaken and under the reproach of widowhood, seeing that she is not in communion with the Lord, her Maker; but still she is not quite a widow; there is to be a restoration, because *for a small moment have I forsaken thee . . . saith the Lord thy Redeemer* (Isaiah liv. 6); **that was great among the nations**, respected and powerful; **a princess over the provinces.** The dominion centered in Jerusalem is illustrated by the letter of Artaxerxes to his subordinates, *There have been mighty kings over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all the country beyond the river; and tribute, custom, and toll was paid unto them* (Ezra iv. 20). This jurisdiction over dependent peoples was at its height in the reigns of David and Solomon, though after them there were also kings whose rule embraced others beside the Jews. In sad contrast she **is become a vassal**, generally **shown by taskwork**, not so often by money-payment, and expressing entire subservience.

(ב) Ver. 2. Intense grief overwhelms her, **She weeps bitterly in the night**; no temporary oblivion comes to her; the silent hours pass with her tears **on her cheeks.** For her there **is no comforter among all her lovers**; **all her friends**, or neighbours, **have dealt treacherously with her.** *The Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them* (Ezek. xxiii. 23), were alienated from her, while Egypt, Ammon, Edom, Moab, disowned their alliance **with her: they are become her enemies**, and gloat over her downfall (2 Kings xxiv. 2).

(ג) Ver. 3. **Judah**, the population of the whole territory, with that of Jerusalem, **is taken into exile**, a subjugated, impoverished remnant being left. **From affliction**, the same expression occurs in Exod. iii. 17 and Ps. cviii. 4, and from much servitude, not, as might seem intimated by the Authorised Version and Revised Version, that the Jews were led into captivity because of the manumitted Hebrew servants being again subjected to bondage by their richer brethren (*v.* Jer. xxxiv. 8–12); not that the Jews fled as voluntary emigrants to escape the oppression of conquerors; but that, from the low depth of misery into which they had been brought by the invasions and exactions of foreign powers, from months of faction and coercion and famine, they were taken into the lower depth of being made captives. In Babylon, in the centre of old world civilisation, with its traffic and magnificence, **she has not found rest.** Nebuchadnezzar employed "them upon those large works of irrigation and the building of cities, for which his ambition required labourers, just where they were forced to share and contribute to Babylonian life." *Thou didst show them no mercy; upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke* (Isa. xlviii. 6). **All her pursuers have overtaken her between the straits**; they laid affliction upon her when she was already pressed in by trouble; hit her when **she was down.**

(ד) Ver. 4 introduces another view personifying the religious condition: not the banished people, not the fallen city, but the dwelling-place of the Holy One of Israel is forsaken and overthrown. **The ways of Zion**, not the streets in Jerusalem leading up to the Temple, but the roads from all quarters of the land, which found their termini in the *Holy hill*, **are mournful**, for they are entirely deserted; being without those who go to a solemn assembly none come to appear before the Lord in His courts at set times, as He had enjoined His worshippers to do; **all her gates**, which Jehovah loveth, **are desolate**, broken down; no one goes up to or lingers about them. The Temple has lost its sanctity and is open to all intruders. The glory has departed from it: **her priests are sighing**; her virgins are afflicted. "The reason why the priests and the virgins are here conjoined is that lamentation is made over the

cessation of the religious feasts. The virgins are here considered as those who enlivened the national festivals by playing, singing, and dancing (Ps. lxviii. 26; Jer. xxxi. 13)" (Keil). And she is in bitterness herself, as if all was lost religiously as well as politically.

(ה) Ver. 5. Her adversaries are become the head, as was threatened if unfaithful to the Lord (Deut. xxviii. 44); her enemies prosper, are in peace, and rest secure, knowing that all resistance is over, so completely has she been crushed. This was brought about not by their might, but because Jehovah has afflicted her for the greatness of her transgressions; and the sufferings befall the most innocent also; her young children have gone captives, the most ominous of all her disasters, driven like a band of the enslaved in Africa, before the adversary.

(ו) Ver. 6. She has not only been harried of her most precious and tender charges, also from the daughter of Zion is departed all her beauty. God Himself, whose Shechinah made *Zion the perfection of beauty*, no longer shined there; no longer was there a worship of Him in *the beauty of holiness*, and even her princes are become like harts that do not find pasture; enfeebled by the scanty diet of the close siege, they have lost vigour, and go without strength when chased before the pursuer, so as to be easily caught. This is in evident allusion to the flight and capture of the King and his men of war, within a few miles from Jerusalem, when it was besieged by the Chaldean army (2 Kings xxv. 3–5).

(ז) Ver. 7. Again a change of aspect is presented. Already the city ruined, the people exiled, the holy mountain desecrated have been regarded. Now the poet gives the name of the city, which he shrank from pronouncing before, and uses it as a generic, all-embracing term, Jerusalem remembers, adding an item of pungency to her deep sufferings, in the days of her affliction and—a probable meaning of the following word is *wanderings*, as in margin of Revised Version here. In chap. iii. 19, where the same word is again employed, the margin gives *outcast state* as a fresh rendering. That of the Speaker's Commentary is to be preferred—homelessness, describing the state of the Jews cast out of their homes and driven into banishment; all her pleasant things which were from the days of old. *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.* "Sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." When her people fell into the hand of the adversary, and there is no helper to her; the adversaries see her, they sneer at her cessations (*desolations* in Revised Version). This last Hebrew word occurs only here. Its root means to cease, and so this derivative is applied, as by Plumptre, to "the enforced Sabbaths of untilled land, and the Sabbaths conspicuous for the absence of any religious rites." This seems far-fetched, except as to the latter part, and this should be considered as but a portion of the Jewish customs which had been discontinued. If Romans derided the Jews for cessation from work on the seventh day of the week, Babylonians would not. They may have mocked at the faith of Israel in the supremacy of Jehovah, seeing they regarded Him as a subjugated national deity; but "it was no subject of wonder to the Babylonians that the Jews celebrated a weekly day of rest, as they had one of their own (*sabbatu*)"—(Cheyne).

(ח) Ver. 8. Jerusalem has sinned a sin, has broken the law of her God with determinate will, and bears the natural penalty; therefore she is become as an unclean one; not as one who has been *removed* (Authorised Version) as a captive from her native place, but as one set aside because of impurity. All who honoured her despise her, for they see her nakedness; her evil is laid bare; the very peoples who had respected her, and who had far less knowledge of what was right and true than she, are now alive to the real character of her procedure, and count it shamefully bad. Even Nebuzar-adan, captain of the Babylonian guard, could say, after her overthrow, *Because ye have sinned against Jehovah and have not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing is come upon you* (Jer. xl. 3). There was still a sensitiveness of conscience in the ideal Jerusalem; Yea, she sighs and turns backward, moaning, as if conscious of spectators and mortified by her open shame, she is fain to screen herself, "as those in such case would do that have any shamefacedness or spark of ingenuity at all in them."

(ט) Ver. 9. Her evil is very obvious, her defilement is in her skirts, not below, but manifest on her long flowing robe; she remembers not her latter end; as she continued sinning, she paid no regard to the issue of it all, and, in consequence of this want of forethought, she is come down wonderfully, down to the lowest depth of misery, an astonishment to herself, and to all around her; there is no comforter for her. Her conviction of sin, and shame, and sorrow impels her to go to her God, and she cries, See, O Jehovah, my affliction, for the enemy doth magnify himself, the appeal is supported on two bases: (1) Her humiliation; and, (2) The arrogant pretensions of her foes; surely with some vague hope like that of the Psalm-writer, *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me; thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of thine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me* (cxxxviii. 7).

(י) Ver. 10. His hand the adversary stretches out upon all her pleasant things, treasures of all sorts, thus described by Isaiah (lxiv. 11, 12), *Thy holy cities are become a wilderness, Zion is become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste.* The plundering of the Temple was the most aggravating of all, for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thine assembly; heathens, who were not admissible even into the congregation of the Lord—into religious communion with Israel—had trod the courts which were most holy to Jewish worshippers, and

where only priests could legitimately go, and they had pillaged *the pleasant vessels of the house of Jehovah*, therewith to adorn the shrines of their idol deities.

(כ) Ver. 11. In ver. 4 the priests sigh; in ver. 8 Jerusalem sighs, and here one and all, because in addition to the religious collapse, a terrible bodily hunger is universally felt, so **all her people are sighing, are seeking bread.** This use of participles signifies that both the past and present condition of the people is regarded by the writer. He saw that the scanty meals to which they were reduced when beleaguered by the Chaldean army had not ended after the Temple had been desecrated and despoiled; they had parted and were parting with ornaments, jewellery, every one of their valuables, merely to keep body and soul together; **they give their pleasant things for food**; after a close siege of eighteen months, preceded by the overrunning of the country, food-supplies must have been all but exhausted; **to restore their soul**, to bring back life, to *those who are drawn unto death* (1 Kings xvii. 21), and spiritually to *restore the soul* (Ps. xix. 8). There is bread of which *if any man eat he shall live for ever*, given by Him who gave His *flesh for the life of the world*. Was there any undefinable longing for such bread in the following appeal, similar to that of ver. 9, but somewhat intensified? **See, O Jehovah, and behold, for I am become despised!** Would He take away her reproach? Thus a transition is made to the lamentation and supplication of Jerusalem herself in the following half of this elegy.

Vers. 12–22. These verses form the second section of the poem. The city is represented as complaining of its harassed condition, 12–16, and then as acknowledging her persistent sin in sight of her righteous Lord, who will deal out justice to all transgressors, 17–22.

(ל) Ver. 12. The curtness of the opening Hebrew phrase causes doubt as to its proper explanation. Hence by some it is taken as an address to the wayfarers, and is paraphrased in words like, "I pray all you," or "Oh, that my cry might reach all you." By others it is taken as a question, and more reasonably: so they explain it by words like, "Does not my misery come to you?" or "Do you not observe what has befallen me?" In either case it conveys a call, as from the weeping, solitary woman, sitting on the ground, to all travellers to consider her deplorable state, and our English Versions have caught the right tone. **Is it nothing to you, all ye passers by the way?** Is there nothing in my condition to produce seriousness in you instead of indifference or levity? Nothing to warn you? Nothing to call forth your sympathy? **Behold and see if there is sorrow like my sorrow.** The feeling of a troubled present tends to make it loom before the sufferer as if there never was the like before, **which is done to me whom Jehovah has afflicted in the day of the heat of his anger.**

The ascription, in religious addresses, which has been often made of this verse to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, is far from commendable. In a very real sense His sorrows were unparalleled, but innocent of sin though He was, He made no attempt to call attention to Himself as peculiarly afflicted. His thought was for others' sufferings. *Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.*

(מ) Ver. 13. Here begin references to various events which had contributed to her unequalled sorrow. Fire, a net, sickness and a yoke are set forth. The figure presented in the last clause of the preceding verse is now more fully traced. **From on high he sent fire**, *Upon the wicked He shall rain fire* (Ps. xi. 6), **into my bones**, where pain is supposed to be most keenly felt. She recognises that the cause, which is behind all visible causes, of her pain is in the spiritual realm, and that in the face of the Eternal Righteousness her bones must be shrivelled up; **and it overpowered them.** The next figure is, **He spread a net for my feet; he turned me back.** So entangled, she could not go away and escape capture. The third figure is sickness. **He made me desolate, all the day faint.** The light of her life was quenched, and she was constantly exhausted.

(נ) Ver. 14. There follows a figure from agricultural pursuits. **A yoke [formed] of my transgressions is bound by his hand.** The Hebrew verb here is of uncertain meaning, and there is no rendering preferable to that which is given. She has made thongs or cords for the yoke with her sins; **they are twisted together.** Her misdoings have acted and reacted that they are knit together, so as to constitute a thraldom which cannot be thrown off; so intertwined **they have come up upon my neck.** A consequence of this enthralment by the knotted yoke is, **it has made my strength to fail**, literally to stumble, *i.e.*, to stagger from the weakness and exhaustion incident to such a fearful yoke. The yoke of transgression is hard; the yoke of Christ is easy. The conviction is now expressed that the Divine Ruler is at work, and a new phase rises in the lamentation. **The Lord has given me into the hands [of those that are against me]. I am not able to stand up.** She can do nothing but yield. Consciousness of transgression paralyses body and mind. Note that it is the general, not the covenant name of her God which she utters. This title occurs fourteen times by itself in this book, while in the Prophecies of Jeremiah only along with the covenant name. The reason for this usage of Lord, and of refraining from Jehovah has yet to be found. To say that the people, in their punishment, felt the Lordship of the Deity more, and His covenant love to them less, is a statement which is not confirmed by an examination of the passages in the Lamentations where each name is found.

(ס) Ver. 15. Inability to resist is associated with other fatal experiences. **He has set at naught all my strong ones**; not on an open battlefield, not in a struggle to hold an important post, is it that her able-bodied men are counted for nothing before the Chaldean host; losses

they might have had, "the bubble reputation" attached to them, but not when cooped up in the city, in the midst of me. He has convoked a solemn assembly against me; it is the word used of the annual and other religious festivals, as in ver. 4, and intimates that to the enemies of Jerusalem a call had been issued to gather at an appointed time and have such joy as might be found in the ability to crush my young men, those who promised to be the strength of the nation in the generation following. And, to make the overthrow complete, the maidens, who had been carefully guarded from violence, the Lord has trodden as in a wine-press the virgin daughter of Judah. The treading of the grapes in a wine-press, as illustrative of the execution of divine judgment, is not unusual in the Scriptures (Isa. lxiii. 5; Rev. xiv. 19), and signifies both suffering and good results from suffering rightly borne—

"Still hope and trust, it sang; the rod
Must fall, the wine-press must be trod."

(פ) Ver. 16. Having shown by the events how terrible her sorrow could not but be, Jerusalem reiterates her complaint with a flood of tears. Because of these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runs down with water, so great is her trouble and so unalleviated, for far from me is the comforter, the restorer of my soul. My children are become desolate, and cannot cheer me, for the enemy has prevailed.

(צ) Ver. 17. The sobs of the weeper stifle her utterance. In the pause the poet himself seems to take up the word, something like the part of the chorus in Greek tragedies, and describes the state of the three personified objects—the Temple, the people, the city. He sees that Zion, representing *the house of prayer for all nations*, stretches out her hands, as praying in a *land where no water is*, but in suspense; there is no comforter for her. He sees that Jehovah, her covenant God, has commanded concerning Jacob, representing the people whom He chose for His heritage, that those round about him, the neighbouring nations, should be his adversaries. He sees that Jerusalem, representing the government and national aspirations, has become as an unclean one among them (ver. 8).

(ק) Ver. 18. During her pause the weeper has received new thoughts. Like the younger son when feeding on husks, she has *come to herself* so far that she is ready to own the justice of Jehovah in her sufferings. He is righteous, Jehovah, for I have disobeyed his voice, rejected the words of His mouth. Yet she sorely wants human pity, and cries to them, Hear, I pray; all ye peoples, and see my sorrow; the flower of her youth has gone into captivity.

(ר) Ver. 19. She addresses Jehovah, and tells how her appeals to the friends of her prosperous days have proved futile; I called to my lovers; they have deceived me, disappointed my hopes; and not only they have failed; my priests and my elders have expired in the city, where they had been high in position, the medium between God and His worshippers, and leaders in the state, when they sought food for themselves to restore their souls, they were starving, like the common people in the closely invested city, and made a strenuous quest for some means to keep themselves alive in famine.

(ש) Ver. 20. Again she refers to Jehovah as to her forlornness and aggravated sin. See, O Jehovah, for I am in distress, and this distress is felt: (1) Internally. My bowels are troubled, my heart is turned within me; agitation and anguish excite her, even her vital parts, as it were, change their position. The reason therefor is not ascribed to man's neglect and inhumanity to her, but, (2) to her disregard of God, for, she confesses, I have grievously disobeyed. The penalty she undergoes is calamitous indeed; abroad the sword bereaveth, she is rendered a mourner because of slaughter in the open country and in the streets; at home is like death, as if nothing but the dead were in the houses—so overpowering was the exhaustion from starvation and diseases. This somewhat halting explanation may be compared with the free rendering of the Septuagint translator—at least there is no extant authority in the Hebrew for an equivalent reading—*Outside the sword made me childless as death in the house.*

(ת) Ver. 21. A transition is made from unfaithful friends to open enemies, and they too are denounced. The sounds of her grief have echoed far off among persons unnamed, they have heard that I sigh; again the refrain of this chapter is repeated, there is no comforter for me. The frequent allusions to a personal comforter, vers. 2, 9, 16, 17, 21, are worthy of consideration, as if there was a feeling after a higher gift not yet distinctly perceived. All my enemies have heard of my evil, and understand something of the unseen influences which produced it; they rejoice that thou hast done it. From Jer. xl. 2, 3, it appears that even foes recognised that the calamitous state of the Jews proceeded from their disobedience to Jehovah, though their joy may have been more because of her fall than for the confirmation given to the truth of the Lord. Nevertheless, vengeance for their misdeeds was coming on. The Lord has announced a day of judgment on the heathen as well as on Judah, and the cup of wrath shall be drunk from; thou bringest the day thou hast announced, and they shall become like me in suffering their penalties.

(ת) Ver. 22. Jerusalem further formulates the wish that the retribution due to their guilty actions should not be put aside; Let all their evil come before thee, and do unto them as thou hast done unto me, for all my transgressions. The first natural cry of those that are punished is for justice all round. "If I suffer for every wrong, make every other wrongdoer

suffer equally with me!" In this desire there appears the consciousness that Jehovah must pass judgment upon every form of sin, and rightly, for He *is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*; and also a grim expectation of revenge, under which Edom, Moab, Babylon, &c., disappeared. We may say that confession of her own transgressions should have been accompanied with sympathy and pity for other sinners; but the time for that love of enemies did not arrive for many a day. Her own sad state again moves her, For my sighs are many, and my heart is faint. So Jeremiah felt (viii. 18). "With these words the sound of this lamentation dies away."

HOMILETICS.

Grief for a Ruined City.

(Verses 1, 2.)

There is a fine piece of statuary representing the figure of a Hebrew female in a sitting posture, the head and shoulders slightly bent forward, the hair escaping in disordered tresses from the neatly plaited fillets, the arms, carelessly crossed over each other, resting helplessly in her lap, the eyes, moistened with tears, gazing wistfully on the ground, and the face expressing in every feature the tenderest pathos of sorrow. The whole figure seems to quiver with irrepressible emotion. Every part is moulded with voluptuous grace, and is susceptible of the deepest passion, but it is the passion of an inconsolable grief! The genius of the artist has thus sought to idealise unhappy Judah weeping amid the scattered fragments of national ruin. It is a reproduction, by the art of the nineteenth century, of the same sad image that appeared on the well-known medal of Titus, struck to celebrate his triumph over Jerusalem—a woman sitting weeping beneath a palm-tree, and below is inscribed the legend *Judea capta*. It is startling to observe how exactly the heathen conqueror copied the poetic description by Jeremiah of the forlorn condition to which his beloved country was reduced. These words describe a pathetic picture of *grief for a ruined city*.

I. **Because of its utter desolation.** "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people" (ver. 1) There is a tradition that Jeremiah wrote these elegies in a grotto that is still shown, situated in the face of a rocky hill on the western side of Jerusalem; and there is a freshness and versatility in the images employed, as if every time he glanced at the ruins of the ill-fated city, full in his view, he was unable to repress a new outburst of grief. He had seen Jerusalem in prosperity, its Temple thronged with worshippers, its commerce flourishing, its people content and joyous; but now all is changed; the market-place is empty, the streets silent, the princes and people in exile, and the Temple, which the Jew fondly dreamed invulnerable, was a heap of ruins. Such desolation was unparalleled in the history of the nation and in the experience of the prophet, and his heart was riven with anguish. We may read about the decay of great cities without emotion; but to witness the demolition of our own city is a different matter.

II. **Because of the loss of its beloved chief.** "How is she become as a widow!" (ver. 1). A city is often described as the mother of its inhabitants, the king as husband, the princes as children. When the king is gone, and not even a representative is left, the city is widowed and orphaned indeed. The condition of an Eastern widow is pitiable. Her hair is cut short, she strips off all her ornaments, eats the coarsest food, fasts often, and is all but an outcast in the family of her late husband. The image employed by the prophet would therefore be painfully suggestive to the Jewish mind.

III. **Because of its humiliating subjection.** "She that was great among the nations and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary?" (ver. 1). The older meaning of the word tributary refers not to a money-payment, but to personal labour (Josh. xvi. 10). The city that ruled from the Nile to the Euphrates is now reduced to slavery, and the few inhabitants who are left must render bond-service to a heathen potentate. It is galling to a once proud and

prosperous people to be thus humiliated. They who will not serve God faithfully must be compelled to serve their enemies.

IV. Because of its being cruelly betrayed. "Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies" (ver. 2). Her allies, who made great protestations of attachment when all was prosperous, not only forsake her when adversity comes, but unite with her enemies in completing her destruction. It is a bitter irony of human professions when love turns to enmity and friendship to treachery. "A loose tooth and a fickle friend are two evils." The sooner we are clear of them the better; but who likes the wrench? If we lose the comfort of God, we are not likely to find help in man. We can trust in no one if we cannot trust in God.

V. Is expressed with irresistible pathos. "She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks" (ver. 2). It was a fine touch of poetic genius when the prophet selected a sorrowful woman as an emblem of a disconsolate city. Woman is never so fascinating, so tender, so bewitchingly irresistible in commanding sympathy as when she is in tears! The hardest heart is melted, the sternest enemy subdued. The sorrow of Judah was overwhelming because the ruin was so unexpected and unparalleled. No city has been wept over like Jerusalem. The melancholy wail has been prolonged through the centuries, and is reproduced to-day. The Lamentations are still read yearly by the Jews to commemorate the burning of the Temple. Every Friday, Israelites young and old, of both sexes, gather at the wailing-place in Jerusalem, where a few of the old stones of the Temple still remain in the wall, and, amid tears, recite these sad verses and suitable psalms, as they fervently kiss the stones. On the 9th of the month Ab, nearly our July, this dirge, composed about 600 years before Christ, is read aloud in every synagogue over the world. Weeping is not repentance; but the tears of the contrite do not flow in vain. They are noted in heaven, and God will help.

LESSONS.—1. *The ruin of a once prosperous city is a sad and suggestive spectacle.* 2. *The miseries of others should rouse our compassion.* 3. *The greatest grief finds relief in tears.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 1. "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people." **A populous city.** 1. A busy scene of activity, gaiety, sin, sorrow, and complicated experiences. 2. Produces a strange sensation upon the belated visitor when it is hushed in the silence of sleep. 3. Its ruin a subject of profound sorrow and suggestive reflections to one who has known it in the flood-tide of its prosperity.

— "How has she become as a widow, she that was great among the nations." **Widowhood.** 1. Suggestive of loss—loss of happiness, solace, guardianship, affection. 2. Implies loneliness, dejection, sorrow. 3. A painful experience when contrasted with a former state of affluence and grandeur.

— "Princes among the provinces, how is she become tributary." **The strange reverses of fortune.** 1. The ruler becomes the ruled. 2. The free are the conquered. 3. Wealth exchanged for poverty. 4. Life dependent on abject submission to those who were once our inferiors.

Ver. 2. "She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks." **The pathos of tears.** 1. A sublime spectacle in the ideal woman. 2. An evidence of profound sorrow. 3. Gathers its significance from the character of the calamity it bewails. 4. A merciful relief to an intensely sensitive nature.

— "All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they are become her enemies." **The fickleness of human friendships.** I. *Genuine friends are rare.* They may usually be counted on a thumb and finger; the one is the wife or husband, the other is the mother,

who is father, mother, and a great deal more. There is no folly so fanatical as that which flings away a real friend. II. *Friends are plentiful when we do not need their help.* They depend on us more than ever we had occasion to depend on them. While we can help them, their friendship is effusive and their vows of fealty emphatic. When our power declines, so does their attachment: when our circumstances alter, so do they. They are swallow friends, fluttering merrily about us in the summer-time of prosperity, but suddenly become invisible when the winter of adversity sets in. III. *It is a sad proof of the perversity of human nature when a friend is transformed into an enemy.* The enmity is often the more rancorous because of the intimacy of a former friendship. The secrets confided in a moment of familiarity are used against us with a studied ingenuity of irritating spitefulness. It is a painful shock to an unsophisticated youth, and leaves a wound that time cannot heal, when he discovers for the first time the base treachery of a pretended friend.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Mutual sympathy in sorrow.** When Henry VII. heard of the sudden death of his son Prince Arthur at Ludlow Castle in 1502, he said, "Send some one for the Queen; let me bear this grief with her." She came and did her best to comfort him. She then retired to her own room, was overwhelmed with sorrow, and swooned away. It was now his turn to cheer and comfort. On both sides it was, "Let me bear this grief with her," and, "Let me bear this grief with him." And thus in their retreat at Greenwich the King and Queen of England mourned in silence for the loss of their first-born son.

— **It is the weeping cloud that blesses the earth.**

Grief useless that does not lead to active help. We are sorry (for the English are a kind-hearted people) for the victims of our luxury and neglect; sorry for the thousands whom we let die every year by preventible diseases, because we are either too busy or too comfortable to save their lives; sorry for the savages whom we exterminate by no deliberate intent, but by the mere weight of our heavy footstep; sorry for the thousands who are used up yearly in certain trades in ministering to our comfort, even to our very luxuries and frivolities; sorry for the Sheffield grinders, who go to work as to certain death; sorry for the people whose lower jaws decay away in lucifer-match factories; sorry for the diseases of artificial flower-makers; sorry for the boys working in glass-houses whole days and nights on end without rest, "labouring in the very fire, and wearying themselves with weary vanity." We are sorry for them all, as the giant is for the worm on which he treads. Alas! poor worm. But the giant must walk on. He is necessary to the universe, and the worm is not. So we are sorry, for half an hour, and glad too (for we are a kind-hearted people) to hear that charitable persons or the Government are going to do something towards alleviating these miseries. And then we return, too many of us, each to his own ambition, comforting ourselves with the thought that we did not make the world, and we are not responsible for it.—*C. Kingsley.*

The All-seeing God and the lonely. God sees you always. There is no moment when He does not see you, night or day, waking or sleeping, alone or in company. It is told of Linnæus, the famous naturalist, that he was greatly impressed with this thought, and that it told upon his conversation, his writings, and his conduct. He felt the importance of this so much, that he wrote over the door of his study the Latin words, *Innocui vivite; Numen ad est.* "Live innocently; God is here!"

Christianity relieves the miseries of great cities. Look at those noble buildings which the generosity of our fellow-countrymen have erected in all our great cities. You may truly find in them sermons in stones; sermons for rich and poor alike. They preach to the rich, these hospitals, that the sick-bed levels all alike; that they are the equals and brothers of the poor in

the terrible liability to suffer. They preach to the poor that they are, through Christianity, the equals of the rich in their means and opportunities of cure. Whether the founders so intended or not, these hospitals bear direct witness for Christ. They do this, and would do it even if—which God forbid!—the name of Christ was never mentioned within their walls. That may seem a paradox, but it is none; for it is a historic fact that hospitals are the creation of Christian times and of Christian men. The heathen knew them not. In the great city of ancient Rome, as far as I have been able to discover, there was not a single hospital, not even a single charitable institution. Fearful thought! A city of a million and a half inhabitants, the centre of human civilisation, and not an hospital there! The Roman Dives paid his physician; the Roman Lazarus literally lay at his gates full of sores, till he died the death of the street dogs which licked those sores, and was carried forth to be thrust under ground awhile, till the same dogs came to quarrel over his bones. The misery and helplessness of the lower classes in the great city of the Roman Empire, till the Church of Christ arose literally with healing in its wings, cannot, I believe, be exaggerated.—*C. Kingsley.*

— When you hear a man praising "the good old times," ask him how the peasantry were then sheltered and fed.

The power of tears. A young lady once visited a lunatic asylum, and was led into a room where there was but one patient, a young girl of the same age as herself. She was standing in the corner of the room, her face almost touching the wall. In stony hopelessness she stood. She neither looked nor spoke. She might have been dead but that she still stood on. It was a pathetic sight. "Will you speak to her?" asked the doctor; "we can do nothing with her. She has been thus for days; but one like yourself might move her." The young lady stepped forward, and, with an upward cry for Divine help, laid her hand gently on the shoulder of the listless form, and with tears in her eyes spoke one sentence of yearning sympathy and compassion. The spell was broken. The poor patient turned, gazed for a moment on the face of the weeping visitor, and then burst into tears! The doctor exclaimed, "Thank God, she may now be saved!" The visitor could never recall the words she had used; but, with the voice softened with tears, they had done their work. The still and cold indifference of the patient gave way before the warmth of a pitying heart and the magic touch of a hand stretched out to help. The eloquence of tears is irresistible.

The friends of youth: Where are they?

"I sought you, friends of youth, in sun and shade,
By home and hearth; but no! ye were not there.
Where are ye gone, beloved ones, where? I said.
I listened, and an echo answered, Where?

Then silence fell around: upon a tomb
I sat me down, dismayed at death, and wept;
Over my senses fell a cloud of gloom;
They sank before the mystery, and I slept.

I slept, and then before my eyes there pressed
Faces that showed a bliss unknown before;
The loved whom I in life had once possessed
Came one by one, till all were there once more.

A light of nobler worlds was round their head;
A glow of better actions made them fair.
'The dead are there,' triumphantly I said;
Triumphantly the echo answered, 'There'!"
—*Clive.*

HOMILETICS.

The Judgment of Oppression.

(Verse 3.)

I. The oppressor is in turn oppressed. "Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction and because of great servitude." The prophet would probably have

In view the circumstances narrated in Jer. xxxiv., where the Jewish princes and people were threatened with captivity, because, in violation of the law, they withdrew the grant of liberty made to their servants, and reduced them to their former servitude, aggravated with increased exactions. It is an oft-repeated charge against the Jews that they robbed and oppressed their own countrymen; and the day came when they were robbed and oppressed by their powerful conquerors. It is a cruel abuse of power when it is used to injure the helpless. Every act of wrong-doing carries within it the germ of future recompense. The boomerang rebounds towards the man who threw it.

II. **The judgment is constant.** "She dwelleth among the heathen; she findeth no rest." The endless and impossible tasks imposed on others are now allotted to the oppressors. There is no prospect of release—they *dwell* among the heathen; no prospect of abatement—they find no rest. Judgment knows nothing of pity: while the sinner remains obdurate, its mission is to punish. There is no change in the punishment until there is a moral change in the offender. Divine mercy alone can break the entail of suffering, and that can be effected only by satisfying the claims of justice.

III. **The judgment cannot be evaded by flight.** "All her persecutors overtook her between the straits." Zedekiah and the princes of Judah strove to escape from besieged Jerusalem, but the wary Chaldeans pursued and captured them (Jer. lii. 7, 8). The people fled to the mountain passes, but they were there confronted by the enemy, and flight was impossible. Like hunted deer, whichever way they turned, they found themselves within the toils of the invaders. The conquerors held them as in a grip of steel. The day came when the Chaldeans were similarly helpless in the hands of a superior force. Judgment perpetually dogs the heel of the oppressor, and every possible avenue of escape is carefully guarded. Oppression is the attempt of an imperious will to have its own way, and it does not answer. "Not thy will but mine be done," changed Paradise into a desert. "Not My will but Thine be done," changed the desert into Paradise, and made Gethsemane the gate of glory.

LESSONS.—1. *Oppression is a short-sighted policy.* 2. *The spoils gained by oppression are worthless.* 3. *The law of retribution is always at work.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 3. "Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction and great servitude." **A time of trouble.** 1. Should induce careful self-examination. 2. Should lead us to reflect whether we have caused trouble to others. 3. Is a call to repentance and moral reform.

— "She dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest." **The changes of life.** 1. Often bring us into the midst of strange, unfriendly associations. 2. Interfere with growth in personal piety. 3. Disturb the soul's peace.

— "All her persecutors overtook her between the straits." **The spirit of persecution.** 1. Instigated by hatred to the good. 2. Is vigilant and active in its cruel pursuits. 3. Takes advantage of the helplessness of its victims.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**The oppressor punished.** There is an Eastern fable that a wicked and oppressive king was once kissed on either shoulder by the Evil One. Immediately there sprang therefrom two serpents, who, furious with hunger, attacked the man and strove to eat into his brain. The terrified king tried to tear them away and cast them from him, when, to his horror, he found they had become part of himself. So is it with those who yield to anger or any other evil passion. The man who tyrannises over others becomes by and by the victim of his own tyrannical temper, and all efforts to deliver himself are in vain; it has become a part of himself. Wrong-doing carries with it its own punishment. In its earlier

stages we fancy it will be easy at any time to do right; but when we try, we are helpless.

The oppressor a selfish man.

"He pours no cordial in the wounds of pain;
Unlocks no prison, and unclasps no chain.
His heart is like the rock, where sun nor dew
Can rear one plant, or flower of heavenly hue.
No thought of mercy there may have its birth,
For helpless misery or suffering worth.
The end of all his life is paltry pelf,
And all his thoughts are centred on himself.
The wretch of both worlds; for so mean a sum,
First starved in this, then damned in that to come!"

A time of trouble. If God brings us into difficulties, we may be sure He will bring us out again; but no such confidence should be ours if we bring ourselves into them.

Trouble and the way out. An expedition started from Buenos Ayres to explore the Pilcomayo River, South America, with the view of establishing a water communication between the Argentine Republic and Bolivia. For the first fortnight the explorers made fair progress, but after that the navigation was difficult and slow, it being necessary to construct dams across the river below their vessel and wait till the water accumulated sufficiently to float it. At length they could proceed no farther, and remained in the same position for months. Having exhausted all their provisions, and their efforts at foraging proving unsuccessful, they daily expected the arrival of a relief party, and were daily disappointed. When they were wasting with famine and had given up all hope, they were surprised one morning by hearing a bugle blast, and knew they were saved. Only those who have been in extremity can realise how exquisite is the joy of sudden and unexpected rescue.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

The changes of life. A mill-owner was obliged to dismiss several of his hands. Among them was a man whose faith and trust in God always led him to say, "The Lord will provide." One day when he had eaten his last morsel of food, and his faith was tried to the utmost, some street-boys, opening his door, flung in a dead raven, shouting mockingly, "The Lord will provide" He quietly took up the dead bird and tenderly stroked its plumage. Suddenly he felt something hard in the crop of the bird, and wondering what it was, he took a knife and opened it. To his amazement he found there a gold chain. He felt here was God providing for him and his family. He went straight to a jeweller, telling his story, and asked if he would buy it. The jeweller saw it to be a chain of great value, with initials on it, and said, "If you could learn the name of the owner, would you return it?" "Certainly," replied the workman. "Well then," said the jeweller "it belongs to your late master." Hearing that, the man set off without delay and put the chain into his master's hands, who received it with great joy, as he had on missing it accused one of his servants of theft. Greatly struck with his workman's honesty, he told him he wished him to return to his employment, as he could not part with so honest a man. In the most trying changes of life it is best to do what is right.

Persecution. A sensation was caused in Hungary by a certain Count, a large landed proprietor, giving orders that thenceforth no Protestant was to be engaged in the service of his estate, and that Protestants already employed were disqualified from any further promotion. Any officials who married Protestants were to be at once dismissed. This high-handed procedure was the more remarkable as religious toleration was recognised as a supreme political and social principle, there being already eight different Christian denominations. Persecution and bigotry are weeds difficult to eradicate, and there is no knowing into what eccentric and tyrannical forms they may develop.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

God the Helper of the persecuted. Have faith, O you who suffer for the noble cause, the apostles of a truth which the world of to-day comprehends not, warriors in the sacred fight whom it yet stigmatises with the name of rebels. To-morrow victory will bless the banner of your crusade. Walk in

faith and fear not. That which Christ has done, humanity may do. Believe, and you will conquer. Action is the word of God; thought alone is but His shadow. They who disjoin thought and action seek to divide Deity, and deny the Eternal unity. They who are not ready to bear witness to their faith with their blood are no true believers. From your cross of sorrow and persecution proclaim the religion of the epoch. Soon shall it receive the consecration of faith. From our cross of misery and persecution we men of exile, the representatives of heart and faith of the enslaved races, of millions of men constrained to silence, will respond to your appeal, and say to our brothers, *The alliance is founded.* Answer your persecutors with the formula, *God and the people.* They may rebel and blaspheme against it for a while, but it will be accepted and worshipped by the peoples. —*Mazzini.*

The spirit of persecution inexorable. A poor Anabaptist, guilty of no crime but his fellowship with a persecuted sect, had been condemned to death. He had made his escape, closely pursued by an officer of justice, across a frozen lake. It was late in the winter, and the ice had become unsound. It trembled and cracked beneath his footsteps, but he reached the shore in safety The officer was not so fortunate. The ice gave way beneath him, and he sank into the lake uttering a cry for succour. There were none to hear him except the fugitive whom he had been hunting. Dirk Willemzoon, for so was the Anabaptist called, instinctively obeyed the dictates of a generous nature, returned, crossed the quaking and dangerous ice at the peril of his life, extended his hand to the enemy, and saved him from certain death. Unfortunately for human nature, it cannot be added that the generosity of the action was met by a corresponding heroism. The officer was desirous, it is true, of avoiding the responsibility of sacrificing the preserver of his life, but the burgomaster of Asperen sternly reminded him to remember his oath. He accordingly arrested the fugitive, who, in the month of May following, was burned to death under the most lingering tortures.—*Motley's "Dutch Republic."*

HOMILETICS.

Lamentation over a Forsaken Sanctuary.

(Verse 4.)

I. Because its thoroughfares are no longer thronged with worshippers. "The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts; all her gates are desolate." Those were happy days when the roads leading up to Jerusalem were crowded with eager worshippers, coming to the three great annual festivals—the Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of Tabernacles. The city was jubilant in song, and full to overflowing with life and movement. Now the very roads are represented as mourning, as if they missed the tread of the pilgrims' feet; and the gates look in vain for the travellers they had so often welcomed. "All her gates are desolate."

It is a dispiriting spectacle to see a closed sanctuary, with weeds and grasses growing about the entrance; the more so when we have seen the same sanctuary filled with delighted worshippers. When men forsake the house of God, God forsakes it too, and it is then desolate indeed.

II. Because the office of the ministry is obsolete. "Her priests sigh"—sigh not only for want of bread, because the offerings, which were their means of livelihood, fail; but because their life-work is useless, because the people lapse into ignorance and sin, because the worship of Jehovah is neglected and dishonoured. The true minister is wholly consecrated to his sacred calling; it is the theme of his earnest prayers, his constant study, and exercises his best powers.

Life to him is bereft of its holiest motive, its sweetest relish, when it is baulked of its loftiest purpose. "It is time to sigh when the priests, the Lord's ministers, sigh."

III. **Because the training of the young is neglected.** "Her virgins are afflicted." The virgins are mentioned because they took a prominent part in all religious festivals (Jer. xxxi. 13; Exod. xv. 20; Ps. lxviii. 25); and therefore special notice is taken of the educative loss to them occasioned by disused ordinances. Neglect in the religious training of the young means grave peril to the moral stamina of the community. Religion is the mightiest force in the formation of youthful character. The men and women of the future will be what the Church makes them in their younger years. It has been said—"People fancy that we cannot become wise without becoming old also; but in truth, as years accumulate, it is hard to keep as wise as we were. Man becomes, in the different stages of his life, a different being, but he cannot say that he will surely be better as he grows onwards. In certain matters he is as likely to be right in his twentieth as in his sixtieth year." The young will carry with them through life the influences for good or evil that have been brought to bear upon them in their early days.

IV. **Because the city is deprived of religious ordinances.** "And she is in bitterness." It is a beautiful and touching conception to impersonate the metropolis of Judah as a disconsolate female, troubled with the evident cessation of Divine worship and the universal neglect of religious duties. As is the Church, so will be the city; as is the state of religion, so will be the people. The glory of a city is gone when religious ordinances are abandoned. No loss should be lamented more bitterly than the loss of religion.

LESSONS.—1. *A closed temple anywhere is a pitiable sight.* 2. *Where religious privileges are withdrawn the people suffer.* 3. *Love of worship will always crowd the sanctuary.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 4. "Her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted." **A dispirited ministry.** 1. Because the sanctuary is destroyed. 2. Because the worshippers are scattered and uncared for. 3. Because its maintenance is withdrawn. 4. Because the joyous song of the young is turned to sorrow. "Her virgins are afflicted." 5. Because of conscious imperfections and unfaithfulness.

— "She is in bitterness." **A city in sorrow.** 1. Because its reputation is dishonoured. 2. Because its resources are crippled, its people dispersed, its commerce interrupted, its institutions destroyed. 3. Because the public worship of God is abandoned. 4. Because its future seems hopeless.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Dead and dying Churches.** A barque on her voyage from Hong-Kong fell in with a British ship, the "Guiding Star," helplessly floating about with a fever-stricken crew. When found, only one member of the crew was able to work. The captain, the first mate, the steward, and a seaman had died. Five men were lying helpless, though still alive, and the boatswain had gone mad from the want of proper attention. The "Guiding Star" was towed to Batavia, where the survivors were placed under medical treatment. Are there not Churches to-day that are morally in a similar plight — drifting hospitals, officered with the dead and dying? It will be a mercy if they are spiritually rescued before they become sepulchres, entombing the hopelessly dead.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

The true man superior to his surroundings.—The scientist, while admitting the influence of geographical surroundings in shaping the history and character of nations, admits that nothing would be more erroneous than to suppose that Nature alone acts in determin

ing the conditions of life and of races. Man's activity must be associated with Nature. A country may be prominent and fertile, and yet occupied by a race of men utterly unfit to develop its resources. After all, man is greater than Nature, and it is his lofty mission to subdue it. The energy of the Netherlands turned a swamp into a garden, while their Spanish oppressors, with inexhaustible resources in soil and mineral, sank into decay. We are apt to lay too much stress upon the operation of the law of environment, and to ignore individual responsibility. Plant within man the vital principles of Christianity, and he will soon change his environment.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Ministers not only finger-posts, but guides. There ought to be no hiatus between our declarations and our spiritual conduct. We must not only be finger-posts, but guides, "Lest having preached to others, we ourselves become castaways."

"The love of Christ and His Apostles twelve
He taught, but first he followed it himself."

If we are the channels of good to our fellows, it behoves us to clear away all that might impede the flowing, and defile the purity, of the stream of truth from God.

Youth needs instruction. Narcissus, a beautiful youth, though he would not love them that loved him, yet afterwards fell in love with his own shadow. Ah! how many young men in these days, who were once lovely and hopeful, are now fallen in love with their own and others' shadows, with high, empty, airy notions, and with strange, monstrous speculations, to their own damnation. A youth deprived of instruction and left to his natural development is a pitiable object, and is menaced by many perils.

Work a remedy for misery. Nothing is more remarkable in the Apostles than their unbroken mental health. The histories of religious communities are full of instances of ecstasies and hysterical delusions; but never do we find among our Lord's followers anything approaching to a spiritual craze. This health of theirs came in great measure from their being constantly employed about matters of which their hearts were full. The busy man has neither time nor inclination to nurse delusive fancies. Hard, honest, practical work is a panacea for many ills. Underneath a fresco of the 13th century discovered at Cortona, in Italy, is inscribed the motto, *Sum misero nisi teneam ligonem* —I am miserable unless I hold a spade. —*The Scottish Pulpit.*

The uses of suffering.

"Through long days did Anguish,
And sad nights did Pain
Forge my shield, Endurance,
Bright and free from stain.

Doubt in misty caverns,
'Mid dark horrors sought,
Till my peerless jewel,
Faith, to me she brought.

Sorrow that I wearied
Should remain so long,
Wreathed my starry glory,
The bright crown of song.

Strife, that racked my spirit
Without hope or rest,
Left the blooming flower,
Patience, in my breast."

—*Proctor.*

Love in sorrow. Always through the darkest part of every life there runs, though we may sometimes fail to see it, the golden thread of love, so that even the worst man on earth is not wholly cut off from God, since He will, by some means or other, eternally try to draw him out of death into life. We are astounded now and then to read that some cold-blooded murderer, some man guilty of a hideous crime, will ask in his last moments to see a child who loved him devotedly, and whom he also loved. We are astonished just because we do not understand the untiring heart of the Almighty Father, who in His goodness often gives to the vilest sinner the love of a pure-hearted woman or child. So true is the beautiful old Latin saying, *Mergere nos patitur, sed non submergere Christus*—Christ lets us sink, may be, but not drown.—*Edna Lyall.*

A city in sorrow. In 1576 Antwerp was stormed by the Spaniards with fire and sword. Never was there a more

monstrous massacre, even in the blood-stained annals of the Netherlands. In the course of three days eight thousand human beings were murdered. The Spaniards seemed to cast off even the vizard of humanity. Hell seemed emptied of its fiends. Night fell upon the scene before the soldiers were masters of the city; but worse horrors began after the contest was ended. This army of brigands had come thither with a definite, practical purpose, for it was not blood-thirst, nor lust, nor revenge which impelled them, but greediness for gold. Torture was employed to discover hidden treasure; and, after all had been given, if the sum seemed too little, the proprietors were brutally punished for their poverty or their supposed dissimulation. Women, children, and old men were killed in countless numbers, and still, through all this havoc, directly over the heads of the struggling throng, suspended in mid-air above the din and smoke of the conflict, there sounded, every half-quarter of every hour, as if in gentle mockery, from the belfry of the cathedral, the tender and melodious chimes.—*Motley's "Dutch Republic."*

HOMILETICS.

The Tantalising Indifference of the Enemies of the Church.

(Verses 5–7.)

I. They contentedly enjoy the fruits of their conquest. "Her adversaries are the chief; her enemies prosper." *Her foes have become her masters; her enemies enjoy quiet prosperity—Geikie* (ver. 5). Judea has become so utterly crushed that her conquerors revel in their spoils without fear of resistance, or any attempt at reprisals on the part of the vanquished. If we allow our vices to become our masters, we have the chagrin of seeing them rioting in indulgence while we are powerless to interpose.

II. They have no concern to know the cause of the Church's calamities. "For the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions" (ver. 5). What of that? It is no concern of theirs to pry into moral causes. The invaders wish to strike a blow at imperious Egypt. Judah stands in the way, and, becoming troublesome, must be crushed. They knew not, nor did they care to know, that they were but instruments in the hands of a Higher Power to punish a nation for its sins. It was brought home to Judah that her disasters were provoked by her manifold transgressions, and it was an aggravation of her sufferings that her enemies were utterly regardless and apparently ignorant of all this. Had they understood it, they might have shown more pity.

III. They are indifferent to the sufferings they inflict. "Her children are gone into captivity. Her princes have become like harts . . . without strength before the pursuer" (vers. 5, 6). The young children are driven before the adversary, not as a flock of lambs which follow the shepherd, but for sale as slaves. The princes are hunted down to exhaustion. In the ancient sculptures nothing is more affecting than the mournful processions so often depicted of tender women and young children driven in gangs as captives before their heartless conquerors. In olden times the treatment of prisoners of war was characterised by the most brutal cruelty. They were regarded as an encumbrance, and were often butchered wholesale to save further trouble. They were subjected to degradations from which death would have been a merciful relief.

IV. They make no allowance for the feelings of the conquered regarding their losses. "From the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed. Jerusalem remembered all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old" (vers. 6, 7). In the midst of her distress Jerusalem remembered the happiness of former days,

when the Temple stood out in all the beauty of its architecture, and as the symbol of holiest worship; when the throne was the centre of imperial power and magnificence; when the land was prosperous, and the people united and content. Now the Temple is shattered past recognition, the most distinguished citizens are in exile, the land is desolate, and the people plunged in misery. But all this is nothing to her enemies; they heed not what their victims have lost; they are more interested in what their conquests have gained.

V. **They make sport of the Church's utter discomfiture.** "The adversaries saw her, and did mock at her Sabbaths," *her calamities, her ruined circumstances* (*Geikie; Henderson*). The more literal meaning is her *Sabbatisms*. Foreigners ridiculed the custom of the Jews in ceasing from labour every seventh day, and attributed their ruin to what appeared to them a strange, fanatical practice. Oh, had those Sabbaths been as faithfully observed in spirit as they were in form, how different would have been the career of Judah! The Church is familiar with the scoffs of unbelievers. While she is true to God, they are powerless to harm. It is when she is conscious of unfaithfulness that they begin to irritate.

LESSONS.—1. *It is a hard time for the Church when her enemies triumph.* 2. *God is the refuge of the Church in time of trouble. He is never indifferent to her sufferings.* 3. *The Church should learn to make the best of prosperous times.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 5. "Her adversaries are the chief; her enemies prosper." **New masters:** 1. Soon make evident their newly-acquired superiority. 2. Rule with severity when actuated by a spirit of enmity. 3. Enjoy without compunction the prosperity secured by the ruin of others.

— "The Lord afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions." **Sin:** 1. Is a transgression of the law of God. 2. Has a tendency to multiply itself. 3. Is a prolific source of trouble. 4. Is punished by the Being against whom it is committed.

Vers. 5, 6. **National disaster.** I. *Involves the suffering of innocent children.* "Her children are gone into captivity before the enemy" (ver. 5). II. *Quenches the splendour of its reputation.* "From the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed" (ver. 6). III. *Degrades and harasses its most illustrious rulers.* "Her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer" (ver. 6).

Ver. 7. **Sad memories.** 1. When contrasting present miseries with former joys. 2. When reflecting on the suddenness and completeness of our calamities. 3. When mingled with the heartless mockery of the authors of our misfortunes.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Lessons from the world's treatment.** Three men are my friends, He that loves me, he that hates me, and he that is indifferent to me. Who loves me teaches me tenderness, who hates me teaches me caution; who is indifferent to me teaches me self-reliance.

Loose talk leads to loose conduct. Indulgence in verbal vices soon encourages corresponding vices in conduct. Let any one talk about any mean or vile practice with familiar tone, and do you suppose, when the opportunity occurs for committing the mean or vile act, he will be as strong against it as before? It is by no means an unknown thing that men of correct lives talk themselves into sensuality, crime, and perdition. Bad language easily runs into bad deeds. Select any iniquity you please, suffer yourself to converse in its dialect, to use its slang, to speak in the character of one who relishes it, and I need not tell you how soon your moral sense will lower down to its level. Becoming intimate with it, you lose your horror of it. To be too much with bad men and in bad places is not only

anwholesome to man's morality, but unfavourable to his faith and trust in God. It is not every man who could live as Lot did in Sodom, and then be fit to go out of it under God's convoy.—*The Christian Commonwealth.*

New masters: Tyranny not permanent. By the volcanic eruption among the Tonga group in 1885, a new island was formed. When it was visited a few years after, the soil below the surface was still hot, the temperature at a depth of seven feet being 100° Fahr., while at the surface it was only 74°. With the exception of two young cocoa-nut trees, which seemed not very hardy, there was no vegetation but a few bunches of grass, and a moth and small sandpiper constituted the animal population. It is thought the island will disappear in a few years, as the waves are rapidly wearing the shore-line away. Such has been the history of many a vaunted human tyranny. Its policy was inaugurated with noise and heat, and threatened to revolutionise the existing order. But when it had spent its force and cooled down, it revealed its barrenness, and, worn away with the ever-active waves of time, it at length disappeared.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Sin a poison. What poison one fang of the old serpent will throw into our moral system! Look around and see how many have been poisoned with the desire for strong drink, with lust, with avarice, with pride, with anger, with unbelief. Fiery serpents are among us, and many die of their venom. If we tolerate the least sin, it is a burning drop in the veins of the soul. One touch of the fangs of this serpent will work immeasurable sorrow, even if the soul be saved from death. It is only the power of God that keeps us from being destroyed by this viper. Had he his will, he is a spirit so malignant that no heir of heaven would survive. O God, keep Thine own! Deliver us from the evil one!—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

Sin defies law. A woman named Guerin, in a rage of jealousy, murdered her unfaithful husband. Going to a villa where she learnt he was living with another woman, she stood at the door and called his name. Hearing her voice, he went out to speak to her, and had scarcely crossed the threshold when she stabbed him in the abdomen. He staggered back into the house, and after a few minutes crawled to the window and said in a feeble voice, "Kiss our child, for all is over." The recital of this incident in the court in Paris, told as a woman could tell it, and she a principal actor in the scene, and the evidence adduced that Madame Guerin had borne an irreproachable character and was an excellent mother, so moved the jury that they acquitted her without a moment's hesitation, amid a storm of applause from the public in court. A gush of sentiment disarmed the rigour of the law and choked the voice of vengeance. One wrong does not justify another. But sin defies law and justice, and spreads confusion wherever it reigns.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Avoid the example of the bad. I would desire all young men often to remember the saying of Lactantius, "He who imitates the bad cannot be good." Young men, in these professing times, stand between good and bad examples, as Hercules in his dream stood between virtue and vice, solicited by both. Choose you must who to follow. Oh, that you were all so wise as to follow the best! Life, heaven, happiness, eternity, hang upon it.

Sad memories. A small boat was picked up one morning on the north shore at Troon. It had the appearance of having broken away from a vessel during a great gale in the Clyde. It is a dangerous moment when a young man breaks away from the happy associations of his early life, whether in church or home. Chafing under restraint, he plunges heedlessly into the wide world in search of a larger liberty. Unaccustomed to self-control, he is swayed by every varying current, drifts out to sea, and is ultimately picked up a partial wreck on some far-off shore. Then it is that he is tormented with painful memories; he sees his folly, and laments his reckless severance from

the moral restrictions of a happier time. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Memory and music. Music touches every key of memory, and stirs all the hidden springs of sorrow and joy. We love it for what it makes us forget, and for what it makes us remember.

Beware of melancholy. Never give way to melancholy; resist it steadily, for the habit will encroach. A lady was once given two-and-twenty recipes against melancholy. One was a bright fire, another to remember all the pleasant things said to her, another to keep a box of plums on the mantelpiece and a kettle simmering on the hob. She thought this mere trifling at the moment, but did in after life discover how true it is that these little pleasures often banish melancholy better than higher and more exalted objects, and that no means ought to be thought too trifling which can oppose it either in ourselves or others

HOMILETICS.

The Terrible Havoc of Sin.

(Verses 8–11.)

I. In its revolting defilement. "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, therefore she is removed. Her filthiness is in her skirts" (vers. 8, 9). The expression "grievously sinned" gives the idea of persistent continuance in wickedness. This condition is not reached all at once. It began in trifling with the first enticements to evil. The entrance to the pathway of sin is gaily decked with flowers, but they are flowers that wither as soon as they are plucked. It is overhung with tempting fruits, but they are fruits that turn to bitter ashes between the teeth. It is sprinkled with subtle and delicious perfumes, but they are perfumes that distil the poison of the deadliest drug. The air around palpitates with strains of bewitching music, but it is music that lures its charmed victim down the dizzy slopes of irreparable ruin. The allurement may be presented in the shape of a book, a picture, or a whispered word, that suggests more of evil than it actually expresses, and the soul is blotted with a moral stain that rivers of tears cannot wash away. Every act of sin increases the defilement, and it becomes the more exposed.

II. In sinking the soul to a state of abject degradation. "Therefore she came down wonderfully; she had no comforter" (ver. 9). You have seen the little snowflakes flutter about the railway track like lovely bits of down shook from angelic wings, and you have seen with what ease the proud locomotive scatters the fleecy morsels in the early stages of the storm; but the falling atoms increase with such rapidity and accumulative force, that the panting engine is at length completely mastered, and, utterly exhausted, lies buried fathoms deep beneath the crystal drift. So in the early stages of transgression, the soul deems itself capable of throwing off every little temptation that beguiles, and, when it is too late, discovers itself so completely bound in their toils that all efforts to escape are ineffectual. 1. *Sin dishonours the soul in the estimation of others.* "All that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness" (ver. 8). The first step downwards is to sink in the estimation of others. Their commendation sustained us and helped us to keep up to a certain standard of conduct. Others may see the tendency of our sins before we see it ourselves. When others show their disapproval and despise us for our folly, it is time to pause and reflect. 2. *Sin dishonours the soul in its own estimation.* "Yea, she sigheth and turneth backward" (ver. 8). It is a lower depth when a man sinks in his own estimation, when he cannot courageously confront others, or even face up his better self. Sin saps the strength of our manhood. To be conscious of

sin and ashamed of it are the first hopeful signs of repentance; but if the repentance is not prompt and genuine, the soul is in danger of becoming more thoroughly demoralised. Such a critical moment comes in most men's lives (Ps. lxxiii. 2).

III. **In rendering the soul reckless as to consequences.** "She remembereth not her last end"—had not thought of the sure end of her sins (ver. 9). The down grade is steep, and every step increases the momentum of the terrible descent. One sin leads to another, and that to another in darker and deeper gradations, until the light of hope is quenched, and the helpless victim gropes about aimlessly in the ever-deepening gloom of despair. The soul is now and then haunted with the shadow of a coming reckoning day; but it seems a great way off, and may never come. The reckoning day does come.

IV. **In its desecration of sacred things** (ver. 10). Even the Jew was prohibited from entering the innermost sanctuary, and now the prophet laments that the heathen conquerors force their way into the holy place and plunder Jehovah's Temple, that they may adorn with its sacred vessels the shrines of their false deities. It was desecration to enter the sanctuary, and high sacrilege to rob it of its "pleasant things." Sin knows no respect of persons or places. It obtrudes with shameless effrontery into the holiest place, and is callous as to the havoc it works.

V. **In reducing a people to distress and want.** "All her people sigh; they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul" (ver. 11). Famine follows in the train of war. A siege lasting a year and a half exhausted the surrounding country, and the Chaldean army would have difficulty in supplying its own commissariat. In the hope that the present scarcity will pass away, the people dispose of the wealth and precious jewels that remain to them for the merest trifles of food. Sin is the prolific cause of war, famine, and the acutest forms of personal and national suffering. Money is valueless when it can purchase nothing in exchange—it cannot prolong the life of the starving. The best things are capable of the worst abuse. The very abuse may test the value.

VI. **Compels the soul to appeal to the Divine compassion.** "O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy hath magnified himself" (ver. 9). "See, O Lord, and consider, for I am become vile." I am despised (ver. 11). It is not our vileness that can form a ground of appeal to the Divine consideration, but the abject misery into which our vileness has brought us. God does not pity our sins, but He does pity the distress they occasion, though that distress is the direct result of our obstinate violation of His laws and disregard of His repeated warnings. Suffering is a severe teacher. It is a mercy when the eyes of the sinner are at length opened, and, seeing that his sins are the cause of his trouble, he cries to God for help. Long and patiently does God wait for such a cry; and then with what gracious speed does He hasten to our rescue!

LESSONS.—1. *Sin demoralises wherever it reigns.* 2. *Is the occasion of unspeakable suffering.* 3. *Can be cured only by Divine remedies.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 8. "She sigheth and turneth backward." **Conscious sin:** 1. A painful humiliation. 2. The first step in genuine repentance. 3. Should induce the soul to seek immediate deliverance.

Ver. 9. "She remembereth not her last end." **The course of sin:** 1. Delusive in its beginning. 2. Hardens the transgressor into reckless indifference. 3. Is certain to endin ruin.

— **Sin an implacable foe.** I. *Drags down the soul to comfortless depths.* "Wherefore she came down wonderfully; she had no comforter." II. *Exults over the misery of its victims.*

"The enemy hath magnified himself." *See how proudly the foe deals with me* (*Geikie*). III. *Convinces the soul that its only resource is in the Divine pity.* "O Lord, behold my affliction."

Ver. 10. **Heathenism a moral obliquity.** I. *Sees no sin in theft.* "The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things." II. *Has no scruples in desecrating the holiest place.* "The heathen entered into her sanctuary." III. *Disregards the Divine laws.* "Thou didst command that they should not enter into Thy congregation."

Ver. 11. **The extremities of famine.** I. *A sorrowful craving for food.* "All her people sigh; they seek bread." II. *Desperate efforts made to retain life.* "To relieve the soul"—to keep them alive. III. *The dearest treasures readily sacrificed.* "They have given their pleasant things for meat."

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Sin the danger of great cities.** The spiritual destitution of London is something appalling. There are 10,000 prostitutes—a procession a mile long, walking double file—all somebody's daughters. There are 20,000 thieves—two miles more of that dread procession, and there are 100,000 uncared for children, making the procession ten miles in length. These are what John Bright called the residuum, and Dr. Chalmers the lapsed classes. In their abodes every breath is poison; they are so crowded together that morality is impossible. Such a glimpse of spiritual destitution ought to arouse the heart, not only of every Christian, but of every patriot.

Sin stupifies. Oh, how difficult it is to awake some men to a sense of danger or duty. Happening to be lounging in the market-place of a little seaport town in France, I saw with some surprise several men in a *café* inhaling the fumes of opium through a tobacco-pipe. By-and-by the wife of one of these men called for her husband to return home in their little market-cart. But he, being in a poisoned slumber, was unconscious of her existence, and oblivious of things about him. She lifted him up and shook him, but he would not awake till the honied-trance stupor was ended. So some of us are steeped in the opium-lethargy of sin, and will not awake. It is not that we cannot; we will not.

Sin a disease. A minister once met a man in the street who was afflicted with heart-disease, and said he could not sleep, and that the doctor could do nothing for him. "Ah!" said the minister, "the worst form of heart-disease is sin. Yet people go about with the disease; they do not know it, and they sleep quite soundly. Now, it is my business to tell them how matters stand, and to try to disturb their sleep, for I can tell them of a physician who can cure them. Have you been to Christ with your sins?" The man was silent, but went away deeply impressed.

Sin and individuality. I remember as though it were yesterday the moment when the idea of individual identity dawned upon my boyish mind. The thought appalled me, for I had been looking at a wretched little beggar-boy with a crutch, a dirty face, and miserable rags for garments, and it had just occurred to me that he was not to himself merely an unpleasant object, to be sent away out of sight with some dole of pennies or broken fragments of food, but just the I that I was to myself, as precious, as important; and I grew cold from head to foot, and felt as though I must do something to alter it all. After all these years the horror abides with me yet. I do not know whether others feel it as keenly, but it is to me worse than any ghost could be to remember the wretched people of the world—the prisoners in their cells, convicts in their chains, men doomed to die upon the gallows at dawn, women who sell their souls for bread or jewels, beggars gnawing their crusts by the roadsides, sufferers whose every breath is agony, wives whose hearts are broken by the cruelty of the husbands who were once their lovers, men who are plotting murder and men who are committing it, lepers in the cities of lepers holding out their mouldering hands for alms as strangers flee by their gates. To re-

member these, and many, many more, wicked or accursed, crushed beneath loads of crime and sorrow too heavy to be borne, and to know when we clasp our hands or drop a tear, and say with a shudder, as we sometimes do, "And it might have been I: that it actually is I to some one!" It is a terrible thought, and yet we should not set it aside. Surely nothing could prompt us so strongly to do all we can for those who sin or suffer.

Sin a double defect. The verb used oftenest in the New Testament, *sin*, means literally to miss the mark. The corresponding nouns have, of course, similar meanings. The idea conveyed is deviation from a standard at which men ought to aim, and which they ought to reach. They may miss it by going beyond, as well as by falling short. The moral idea is the same as that of omission and transgression.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

The course of sin.

"We are not worst at once. The course of evil
Begins so slowly and from such slight source,
An infant's hand might stem its breach with clay;
But let the stream get deeper, and philosophy shall strive in vain
To turn the headlong current."

Sin a foe, but not invincible. It is said that the late Lord Ampthill, when on diplomatic service in Rome, possessed a boa-constrictor, and interested himself in watching its habits. One day the monster escaped from the box where he supposed it was asleep, quietly wound itself around his body, and began gradually to tighten its folds. His position became extremely perilous; but the consummate coolness and self-possession which had enabled him to win many a diplomatic triumph befriended him in this dangerous emergency. He remembered there was a bone in the throat of the serpent which, if he could find and break, he would save himself. He was aware that either he or the snake must perish. Not a moment must be lost in hesitation. He deliberately seized the head of the serpent, thrust his hand down its throat, and smashed the vital bone. The coils were relaxed, the victim fell dead at his feet, and he was free! So in all wickedness there is weakness, and it is a grand thing to discern the vulnerable spot, and be ready with the exact truth, fact, or promise which deals death to the foe. This insight and power are given to all who prayerfully study God's Word.

Heathen worship a performance. Marcus Varro, the great Roman antiquarian, wrote forty-one books on the Pagan cultus. He speaks of three orders of gods—the certain gods, the uncertain gods, and the chief and select gods. Referring to the worship offered to these various deities, he arranges his material under four divisions—who perform, where they perform, when they perform, what they perform. How true it is that, apart from genuine spiritual religion, all worship, and especially heathen worship, is but a scenic, pantomimic performance!

Light for heathen darkness. The simile "dark as a coal-pit" will soon lose its meaning and become obsolete. A colliery company has abolished the miner's lamp and lit up one of their pits with electric lamps, placed at intervals of fifteen yards apart. Indeed, the depths of earth and sea are now to be illuminated. One of the difficulties of the deep-sea diver has been the comparative darkness in which he has had to go about his work at the bottom of the ocean. Now a French engineer has constructed a lamp, supplied with petroleum, which burns as well under water as in the open air. By an ingenious contrivance it can be lighted at the bottom of the sea, and with the aid of its friendly light the diver is enabled to discover his greatest treasures. So the earnest missionary penetrates the dark depths of heathenism, holding the lamp of Divine truth, flaming with the burning love of the world's Redeemer, and picks up the most degraded victims of idolatry, who, penetrated and refined by the same Divine light that first found them out, shall shine with the lustre of the finest jewels.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

The horrors of famine. The besieged

city of Leyden was at its last gasp. Bread, malt-cake, horse-flesh, had entirely disappeared; dogs, cats, rats, and other vermin were esteemed luxuries. A small number of cows, kept as long as possible for their milk, still remained; but a few were killed from day to day, and distributed in minute proportions, hardly sufficient to support life among the famishing population. Starving wretches swarmed daily around the shambles where these cattle were slaughtered, contending for any morsel which might fall, and eagerly lapping the blood as it ran along the pavement, while the hides, chopped and boiled, were greedily devoured. Women and children all day long were seen searching gutters and dunghills for morsels of food which they disputed fiercely with the famishing dogs. The green leaves were stripped from the trees, every living herb was converted into human food, but these expedients could not avert starvation. The daily mortality was frightful—infants starved to death on the maternal breasts which famine had parched and withered, mothers dropped dead in the streets with their dead children in their arms. A disorder called the plague, naturally engendered of hardship and famine, now came, as if in kindness, to abridge the agony of the people. The pestilence stalked at noonday through the city, and the doomed inhabitants fell like grass beneath its scythe. From six to eight thousand human beings sank before this scourge alone; yet the people resolutely held out, women and men mutually encouraging each other to resist the entrance of their foreign foe—an evil more horrible than pest or famine.—*Motley's "Dutch Republic."*

HOMILETICS.

A Distressed Nation.

(Verses 12–17.)

I. **Utters a piteous appeal for sympathy.** "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow," &c. (ver. 12). Sorrow craves sympathy. A crumb, an atom, however trifling, is eagerly seized and fondly cherished. It matters not from what source it comes. It is welcome from any casual passer-by, from anybody, from anything. The despairing find comfort in a flower as it gracefully bends towards them; in the mute sympathy of a favourite dog, as it caressingly thrusts its nose into the limp hands. It is easy to exaggerate our troubles and imagine there is no sorrow like our own; but a wider knowledge of the world's ills helps us to correct our magnified estimate. There is only One—the world's Redeemer—whose sufferings are unique and unparalleled.

II. **Painfully conscious of the overwhelming nature of its sufferings** (ver 13–15). 1. *In their fierceness.* "From above hath He sent fire into my bones, and it prevaileth against them"—subdues them (ver. 13). It is no earthly, but heavenly fire which burns in the bones of Jerusalem (*Speaker's Commentary*). It is a fact well established in osteology that inflammation in the bones is not only extremely painful, but dries them up and renders them brittle and useless (*Henderson*). 2. *All attempts to escape from them are futile.* "He hath spread a net for my feet, He hath turned me back: He hath made me desolate and faint all the day" (ver. 13). Judea, like a hunted animal, endeavours to escape, but finds every outlet blocked with nets, and recoils from them in terror, and a sense of utter hopelessness and exhaustion. The only thing to flee from is sin; the only refuge to flee to is God. There is no relief from suffering till we are divested of the coils of our sin. 3. *They are an unmistakable consequence of sin.* "The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand: they are wreathed and come up upon my neck," &c. (ver. 14). The metaphor is taken from agricultural life.

As the ploughman binds the yoke with cords so knotted and twined together that they form a bunch upon the neck of the oxen impossible to shake off, so does God compel Judah to bear the punishment of her sins. The yoke thus imposed by the hand of God, and securely knotted around the neck of Judah by the entangled bonds of her own sins, bows down her strength by its weight, and makes her totter and stumble beneath it. "He hath made my strength to fall" —to stumble (*Speaker's Commentary*). Sin by and by becomes an intolerable burden, and is constantly reasserting its power over us. There is a lake in Switzerland, shut in by high mountains, a solitary, lonely place, which few travellers visit, and where few care to linger, so desolate and homeless is the spot. Here, an old legend says, every night at midnight the watcher may see the ghost of Pilate come to the shore and try with piteous lamentations to wash from his hands some red stains that are upon them—the marks of the blood of Jesus. But as fast as he washes them off they reappear. So is it with all our sins, small and great. 4. *They are an evidence of contemptuous and crushing defeat.* "The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me," &c. (ver. 15). They had not fallen gloriously in the battlefield, but remained ignominiously in the city, confessing their inability to fight. Irving once said, "With every exertion, the best of men can do but a moderate amount of good, but it seems in the power of the most contemptible individual to do incalculable mischief." The governor-general of a Russian province was once mildly remonstrated with by his secretary regarding a high-handed proceeding, producing at the same time a paragraph from a state volume proving the illegality of the action. The angry governor seized the book and sat upon it, shouting, "Where is the law now?" He then pointed to his decorated breast, and continued in a pompous strain, "Here it is; I am the law!" and the secretary had to beat a prudent retreat. It is very humiliating to be in the grip of tyranny like this.

III. **The most passionate expression of sorrow brings no relief.** "For these things I weep, &c. Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her," &c. (vers. 16, 17). Spreading out the hands is a token of the deepest distress. There is no one to comfort—not God, for He is chastening; nor man, for all the neighbouring nations have become enemies (ver. 2). Tears are a sign of weakness and helplessness. To give way to grief is not the way to conquer it. God is the only refuge in distress, and His help, if sincerely sought, is not in vain. The common cry of the Breton mariner is, "My God, protect me! my bark is so small and Thy ocean so vast."

"I am so weak, dear Lord, I cannot stand
One moment without Thee:
But oh! the tenderness of Thine enfolding;
And oh! the faithfulness of Thine upholding;
And oh! the strength of Thy right hand:
That strength is enough for me.

I am so needy, Lord, and yet I know
All fulness dwells in Thee;
And hour by hour that never-failing treasure
Supplies and fills, in overflowing measure,
My least, my greatest need; and so
Thy grace is enough for me."

LESSONS.—1. *It is painful to witness distress we are helpless to relieve.* 2. *National distress is the fruit of national crime.* 3. *National suffering should purify the national life.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 12. **The sufferings of the world's Redeemer:** 1. Appeal to all classes of the human family. 2. Unique in their character and purpose. 3.

Aggravated by the mysterious manifestation of the Divine wrath. 4. The basis of the world's salvation. 5. Should arrest the attention and engage the prayerful thought of the sinner.

— **Is it nothing to you?** I. *The sufferings of Christ upon the Cross were unparalleled.* 1. Because of the dignity of His person. 2. Because of the perfect innocence of His character. 3. Because there was such a conjunction of griefs. 4. Because they were voluntarily undertaken and continued in. 5. Because those for whom He died thus voluntarily were His enemies. 6. Because they were expiatory. II. *The sufferings of Christ have had a deep interest in them for many.* 1. Multitudes have found in them a cure for despair. 2. In others they have wrought a complete transformation of their lives. 3. Had power on men's minds to gird them to heroic deeds. 4. Men who love the suffering Saviour become patient in their every-day sufferings. 5. They learn to hate sin by seeing the agonies by which redemption was obtained. III. *What have you to do with Christ?* Write down your decision whether you will have Christ or not. A poor, suffering girl, who had long loved the Saviour, under a feeling of depression, confessed to her minister that she had deceived herself, and did not love Him. The minister walked to the window and wrote on a piece of paper, "I do not love the Lord Jesus Christ," and said, "Susan, here is a pencil. Just put your name to that." "No, sir," she said, "I could not sign *that*." "Why not?" "I would be torn to pieces before I would sign it, sir." "But why not sign it if it is true?" "Ah! sir," she said, "I hope it is not true. I think I do love Him."—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

— **Our duty towards the Jewish people.** I. *The facts on which the appeal is founded.* The unparalleled sorrow and sufferings of the Jewish people. Where is the nation that has been subject to such universal contempt? All mankind seems to have conspired to despise the Jews. They seem under the curse of Heaven. II. *The appeal itself.* "Is it nothing to you?" That the world should pass by we cannot wonder. That the heathen or Mohammedan should neglect the Jew can excite no surprise. That the mere self-loving nominal Christian should heed him not, is all natural; but that the follower of Christ should pass by may well excite astonishment. It is an error to suppose we need not care to labour among the Jews because the Gospel is a Gentile dispensation, and that the Jews are shut out until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. The Gospel is as much a Jewish dispensation as was the Law. To them it was promised; to them it was given. By them it was proclaimed to the Gentiles, and theirs it still is. Zeal for the honour of Christ should lead us to direct our first endeavours to the Jewish people.—*M'Caul.*

Ver. 13. **Divine punishment.** I. *Marked by great severity.* "From above hath He sent fire into my bones, and it prevaileth against them." II. *Admits of no escape from its toils.* "He hath spread a net for my feet; He hath turned me back." III. *Thoroughly subdues the sufferer.* "He hath made me desolate and faint all the day."

Ver. 14. **The galling tyranny of sin.** I. *Oppressive.* "The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand; they are wreathed and come up upon my neck." II. *Exhausting.* "He hath made my strength to fall." III. *Reduces the soul to helplessness.* "The Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up."

— **The misery of the penitent.** 1. When conscious of the burden of sin. 2. When realising his increasing helplessness. III. When abandoned to reap the consequences of his transgressions. 4. Can be relieved only by the pitifulness of the Divine mercy.

Ver. 15. **Inglorious defeat.** I. *The veteran warriors are captured in the midst of the city from which they had not courage to issue forth and defend.* "The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me." II. *The combinations of the foe were too powerful for the bravery of the young to*

resist. "He hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men." III. *The defeat of the nation is abject and complete.* "The Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a wine-press."

Vers. 16, 17. **The helplessness of despair.** I. *Tears and entreaties are in vain.* "For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water. Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her" (vers. 16, 17). II. *Sin debases a people in the estimation of God and man.* "Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman"—hath become a loathing—"among them" (ver. 17). III. *There is no hope of escape.* "My children are desolate because the enemy prevailed" (ver. 16). "The Lord hath commanded concerning Jacob that his adversaries should be round about him" (ver. 17).

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **A distressed nation: the havoc of war.** When the French army invaded Russia in 1812, and penetrated as far as Moscow, Count Rostopchin, the governor, thinking it more glorious to destroy the ancient capital of the Czars than suffer it to harbour and protect an enemy, caused it to be burned to the ground. The most heartrending scenes were witnessed. The people, hastily snatching up their most precious effects, fled before the flames. Others, actuated by the general feelings of nature, saved only their parents or their infants, who were closely clasped in their arms. They were followed by their other children, running as fast as their little strength would permit, and, with all the wildness of childish terror, vociferating the beloved name of mother! The old people, borne down by grief more than by age, had not sufficient power to follow their families, and expired near the houses in which they were born. No cry, no complaint was heard. Both the conqueror and the conquered were equally hardened. The fire, whose ravages could not be restrained, soon reached the finest parts of the city. The palaces were enveloped in flames. Their magnificent fronts, ornamented with bas-reliefs and statues, fell with a dreadful crash. The churches, with their steeples resplendent with gold and silver, were destroyed. The hospitals, containing more than 12,000 wounded, began to burn, and almost all the inmates perished. A few who still lingered were seen crawling half burnt amongst the smoking ruins; and others, groaning under heaps of dead bodies, endeavoured in vain to extricate themselves from the horrible destruction which surrounded them. From whatever side viewed, nothing was seen but ruin and flames. The fire raged as if it were fanned by some invisible power. The most extensive range of buildings seemed to kindle, to burn, and to disappear in an instant. The wild pillagers precipitated themselves into the midst of the flames. They waded in blood, treading on dead bodies without remorse, while the burning ruins fell on their murderous hands. The signal patriotism of sacrificing the city in order to subdue the enemy actuated all ranks.

Affliction reveals our sins. So long as leaves are on the trees and bushes, you cannot see the bird's nests; but in the winter, when all the leaves are off, then you see them plainly. And so long as men are in prosperity and have their leaves on, they do not see what nests of sin and lust are in their hearts and lives; but when all their leaves are off, in the day of their afflictions, then they see them, and say, "I did not think I had had such nests of sins and lusts in my soul and life."—*Bridge.*

Whose sorrows are like unto mine? O thou erring mortal, repine not. Our Father has some great and wise purpose in thus afflicting thee, and wilt thou dare murmur against Him when He removed the idol that He alone may reign? Pause and reflect. Examine well thy conscience, and see if there were not earthly attractions clinging to thy soul and leading thee to forget the Creator in thy love for the creature. Raise not thy feeble voice against the Most High, lest He send upon thee a still greater trial in order to teach thee submission. Behold His noble example when persecuted by a whole world.

Imagine Him, the God of the universe, standing before the Jewish Sanhedrin, condemned, buffeted, spit upon! One blazing look of wrathful indignation would have annihilated that rude rabble; but, with all the beauty and grace of self-abnegation, He bowed His head and prayed, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." Wouldst thou find relief for thy sufferings? Contemplate the life of Him who spake as never man spake. Follow Him through all those years of toil and suffering. Witness His deeds of mercy and love, and then—go thou and do likewise.—*German Reformed Messenger.*

Self-sacrifice. An extraordinary example of self-sacrifice was witnessed at Chicago. A member of the brotherhood of Knight-Templars was operated upon for cancer, and a wound nearly a foot square was left. The surgeon declared that if the patient was to recover, the wound must be covered with new human skin. At once 132 members of the brotherhood volunteered to allow a small strip of skin to be cut from their arms, so that the pieces thus obtained might be transferred to the wound of their comrade. The operation was performed. Several of the brave fellows fainted, but the majority bore the incision of the surgeon's knife without flinching. It is inspiriting to hear of such heroic self-sacrifice. Much of the suffering of the Christian worker is vicarious; but no number of acts of suffering on behalf of others can equal the sublime sacrifice of Him who suffered and died for the whole race.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Divine punishment and pessimism. Noah was a pessimist to the antediluvian world; Moses was a pessimist to Pharaoh in Egypt; Samuel was a pessimist, and his very first prediction foretold the downfall of the aged Eli and his godless family. Jeremiah was a pessimist, constantly foretelling evil and danger; Jonah was a pessimist, who disturbed the peace of the city, crying, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Nahum was a pessimist, crying, "Woe to the bloody city!" Micaiah was a pessimist when he foretold the overthrow of Ahab, the guilty king, who complained that he never prophesied any good of him. The Saviour was a pessimist, for He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the calamities that were to come upon the world. The Apostles Peter, James, John, Jude were all pessimists, for they were continually foretelling perilous times, departure from the faith, and the coming judgment upon the godless world. The great preachers and poets of the ages have been pessimists, for they were ever warning men of present evil and coming wrath, of predicted calamities and judgments overhanging the godless and profane. — *Christian Repository.*

Sin a slavery.

"There is a bondage which is worse to bear
Than his who breathes, by roof and floor and wall
Pent in, a tyrant's solitary thrall:
'Tis his who walks about in the open air,
One of a nation who henceforth must wear
Their fetters in their souls."

—*Wordsworth.*

Discovery of the destructive work of sin. The steeple of the Church of St. Bride, London, originally built by Christopher Wren, was struck by lightning in 1764, and the upper part had to be rebuilt, when it was lowered eight feet. It was then discovered that an old hawk had inhabited the two upper circles, the open arcades of which were filled with masses of birds' bones, chiefly those of the city pigeons upon which it had preyed. It would be well if more frequent discovery could be made of those wily hawks of society who prey with such merciless and ingenious greed upon the simple and unsuspecting. Their discovery is all the more difficult when they make the Church of Christ their hiding-place, and the clean-picked relics of their numerous victims are all the more sad to contemplate when one at length finds out that the work of plunder has been carried on under the sacred garb of religion.

The misery of the penitent; how cured. Five persons were studying what were the best means for mortifying

sin. One said, to meditate on death; the second, to meditate on judgment; the third, to meditate on the joys of heaven; the fourth, to meditate on the torments of hell; the fifth, to meditate on the blood and sufferings of Christ; and certainly the last is the choicest and strongest motive of all. If ever we would cast off our despairing thoughts, we must dwell and muse much upon and apply this precious blood to our own souls; so shall sorrow and mourning flee away.—*Brooks.*

Remorse. Remorse may disturb the slumbers of a man who is dabbling with his first experiences of wrong; and when the pleasure has been tasted and is gone, and nothing is left of the crime but the ruin which it has wrought, then the Furies take their seats upon the midnight pillow. But the meridian of evil is for the most part left unvexed; and when a man has chosen his road, he is left alone to follow it to the end. —*Froude.*

Inglorious defeat—The retreat from Moscow. The annals of ancient and modern warfare, in the vast catalogue of woes which they record, do not present a parallel to the sufferings of the French on the retreat from Moscow—sufferings neither cheered by hope nor mitigated by the slightest relief. The army in its retreat had to encamp on the bare snow in the midst of the severest winter that even Russia ever experienced. The soldiers, without shoes and almost without clothes, were enfeebled by fatigue and famine. Sitting on their knapsacks, the cold buried some in a temporary, but more in an eternal sleep. Those who were able to rise from this benumbing posture, only did it to broil some slices of horse-flesh, perhaps cut from their favourite charger, or to melt a few morsels of ice. In the march it was impossible to keep them in order, as imperious hunger seduced them from their colours, and threw their columns into confusion. Many of the French women accompanied the army on foot, with shoes of stuff little calculated to defend them from the frozen snow, and clad in old robes of silk or the thinnest muslin; and they were glad to cover themselves with tattered pieces of military cloaks, torn from the dead bodies of the soldiers. The cold was so severe that men were frozen to death in the ranks, and at every step were seen the dead bodies of the soldiers stretched on the snow. Of four hundred thousand warriors who had crossed the Niemen at the opening of the campaign, scarcely twenty thousand repassed it. Such was the dreadful havoc which a Russian winter caused to the finest, best-appointed, and most powerful army that ever took the field.

Christianity addresses the despairing. Throughout all the ages which have followed Christ's word, Christ's message has rung in with power upon men's lives just in proportion to their dejection and despair. One of the earliest attacks upon Christianity was the censure that it was a word to the miserable. Such indeed it is. If it is censurable to move among men when they are dispirited, when they have come to the end of a civilisation, when nothing but blank hopelessness and no remedy lies in front of them, then Christianity is censurable, Christ's message is open to reproach. If that be a fault, it is not faultless. It stands condemned. If too you deem it blameworthy to go to the individual when he has sinned, when he has flung away his life madly, wickedly, passionately, to stand beside him, nay, to bend over him with affectionate interest, when he is lying ragged, beaten, hungry, and filthy in the far country into which he has gone, then neither Christianity nor Christ can escape your blame. They stand convicted of the crime of receiving sinners and eating with them, of laying their hands on lepers who are unclean, of seeking the society of the demented and insane.—*Rev. H. Ross.*

Crying to God. Several children of a family were once playing in a garden when one fell into a tank. When the father heard of it, he asked what means they thought of to rescue their brother from his perilous situation. Inquiring of the youngest, he said, "John, what did you do to rescue your brother?"

The boy answered, "Father, what should I do? I am so young that I could not do anything, but I stood and cried as loud as I could." If we cannot bring a ladder or rope, all can cry, all can plead with God.

HOMILETICS.

The Bitter Fruits of Rebellion.

(Verses 18–22.)

I. That rebellion is the violation of the law of a righteous God. "The Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against His commandment" (ver. 18). "I have grievously rebelled" (ver. 20). A man may fight against God's will and exalt his own; but he cannot fight against the law by which obedience brings peace, harmony, and joy to the soul, and disobedience brings unrest, pain, and deadness. All things in God's universe proclaim the folly of the man who thinks to oppose his will to the Infinite. He may to some extent succeed in thwarting the Divine will; but he cannot prosper. What may seem success will turn into shame and ruin. The violation of law puts us out of harmony with God, Nature, and man.

II. That rebellion is the occasion of great national disasters. 1. *The young are enslaved.* "My virgins and my young men are gone into captivity" (ver. 18). There is little hope for the future of a nation when its young people are in degrading bondage. Christianity has created a just appreciation of the worth of young life. A Japanese woman once came to a Christian lady in Japan with a girl-baby which had been thrown into a ditch by its father, as thousands were, because it was "only a girl." In begging the Christian lady to take care of the naked child, covered with mud, the poor woman said, "Please do take little baby. Your God is the only God that teaches to be good to little children." 2. *Friendships are demoralised.* "I called for my lovers, but they deceived me" (ver. 19). The confusion that springs out of rebellion is a severe strain on the fidelity of professed friends. Promises made with the utmost solemnity are little regarded. One brave and truthful action tells more than a million utterances of the mouth. Genuine friendship is ever frank and true. Simplicity is not the absence of intricacy, but its solution. The true friend, however much misunderstood in a time of disorder, comes out scatheless. 3. *The nation is ravaged by war, famine, and death.* "Abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death" (ver. 20). "My priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls" (ver. 29). Those who should have advised and comforted the people were disabled by starvation, or were lying dead among the slain. 4. *The sufferings of the people are distressingly acute.* "I am in distress; my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me" (ver. 20). My heart is so violently agitated that it seems to have changed its position—to be overturned. It is difficult to conceive words that could more pathetically describe the extremity of grief. Much of our trouble is intensified by forebodings as to the future. God gives us strength to bear each day's burden as it comes. When we stagger and fall because our burden has become too heavy, it is because we have added of our own accord something of the future's weight to that of the present. 5. *The enemies gloat over the national troubles.* "They have heard that I sigh; there is none to comfort me. All mine enemies have heard of my trouble. They are glad that thou hast done it" (ver. 21). It is the acme of cruelty and obduracy of heart to chuckle over the miseries of the fallen. How different is the true Christian spirit. Lord Shaftesbury earned the title of "the good Earl" by his philanthropic endeavours to raise the most depraved. A costermonger who had been a most notorious sinner was once asked, "What did his Lordship say to you

that made you a reformed man?" "Oh, he didn't say much," was the reply. "He just sat down by my side and said, 'Jack, we will make a man of you yet.'" It was the upward gravitation of Christian manhood that helped Jack, and many like him.

III. **That every nation that rebels against God will be certainly punished.** "Thou wilt bring the day that Thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me. Do unto them as Thou hast done unto me," &c. (ver. 21, 22). The prophet, in terms that seem dictated by a spirit of retaliation, is but expressing in prophecy what actually happened in the capture of Babylon—the destruction of the Chaldean empire and of the neighbouring states by which the Jews had been ill-used. He also expressed the general truth, so often exemplified in history, that the nations that ignore God come to nought.

LESSONS.—1. *The greatest troubles of a nation are the result of rebellion.* 2. *God is not indifferent to the sufferings of a nation under punishment.* 3. *Obedience to God is the only guarantee of national prosperity.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 18. "The Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against His commandment." **Divine justice:** 1. Is publicly acknowledged. 2. Must punish rebellion. 3. Is ever mingled with mercy.

— "Hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow." **The voice of sorrow:** 1. Has a lesson for all classes. 2. Cannot express all that is felt. 3. Excites sympathy among the most indifferent. 4. Should lead to inquiry as to its cause.

— "My virgins and my young men are gone into captivity." **Young life:** 1. The hope and strength of a nation. 2. Should be placed in the most favourable circumstances for development and culture. 3. Is crushed by the degradation of slavery.

Ver. 19. "I called for my lovers, but they deceived me." **Human fickleness:** 1. A bitter disappointment when shown by those we love, and who have professed to love us. 2. Cannot bear the strain of a great trial. Fails us when we most need help. 3. A pure, unselfish, faithful affection a rarity. 4. Should teach us to trust alone in God.

Ver. 20. **Sincere penitence:** I. *Shown in a frank and full confession of sin.* "I have grievously sinned." II. *Experiences the most pungent sorrow for sin.* "I am in distress: my bowels are troubled: mine heart is turned within me." III. *Appeals to God alone for mercy.* "Behold, O Lord"

Ver. 21. **A spirit of enmity:** I. *Is coldly indifferent to the troubles of others, though cognisant of them.* "All mine enemies have heard of my trouble." II. *Exhibits a refinement of cruelty in rejoicing over the distresses of its victims.* "They are glad thou hast done it." III. *Will meet with a day of retribution.* "Thou wilt bring the day that Thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me."

Ver. 22. **The punishment of Judah a type of the punishment of all unfaithful nations.** I. *Their sins are fully known to God.* "Let all their wickedness come before Thee." II. *They will be punished according to their actual sins.* "Do unto them as Thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions." III. *They shall know what it is to endure sorrow and exhaustion.* "For my sighs are many, and my heart is faint."

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Rebellion — Dead Sea fruit.**—If Satan ever knows pleasure at all, it is of the foulest and most unsatisfactory kind. Dust is his meat. There is nothing satisfying in the pleasures of rebellion. He remains a disappointed, restless being. The most cunning error which he invents and sustains by philosophy is no more than dust. His whole cause, for which he has laboured these thousands of years with a horrible perseverance, will dis-

solve into dust, and be blown away as smoke. Still doth he feed himself on dust. Let those who are servants of Satan know assuredly that as they are living in sin they will have to eat at their father's table and learn the emptiness of all the pleasures of sin, and the worthlessness of all the treasures of evil. Everything that sin can bring you is just so much dust—foul eating, insufficient, clogging, killing. Though you hoard up wealth, gold is nothing but dust to a dying man. Though you gain all earthly honour, it too dissolves into dust. This is the misery of that great spirit who is called the Prince of Darkness, that he must eat dust all his days. But what misery it must be to be only some poor subject in that unhallowed kingdom, and still to be doomed to the same loathsome fare! Dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. Note that right well; and may God deliver you from such feeding!—*Spurgeon.*

Fomenting rebellion, a ruinous policy. The rebellion in the Netherlands had already been an expensive matter to the crown. The Spanish army numbered more than sixty-two thousand men. Forty millions of dollars had already been sunk, and it seemed probable that it would require nearly the whole annual produce of the American mines to sustain the war. The Transatlantic gold and silver, disinterred from the depths where they had been buried for ages, were employed not to expand the current of a healthy, life-giving commerce, but to be melted into blood. The sweat and tortures of the king's pagan subjects in the primeval forests of the New World were made subsidiary to the extermination of his Netherland people and the destruction of an ancient civilisation. To this end had Columbus discovered a hemisphere for Castile and Aragon, and the new Indies revealed their hidden treasures. The military expenses alone of the Netherlands were more than seven million dollars yearly, and the mines of the New World produced an annual average of only eleven. There was not a stiver left in the exchequer, nor the means of raising one. Such was the condition to which the unrelenting tyranny and financial experiments of Alva had reduced the country.—*Motley's "Dutch Republic."*

Sorrow does not regenerate. On a May day in the French Revolution of 1848, a wretched-looking man was seen dragging himself along by the help of a stick, fleeing from the excited and rushing crowd, till he entered a hall in the Louvre, where was an exquisite piece of sculpture, the Venus of Milos. Before this statue the man broke down, and bitter tears streamed over his face. That man was Heinrich Heine, the scoffing Israelite. This one moment disclosed a whole world of heartache. "Deepest misery, thy name is Heine!" was the passionate cry that escaped his lips. The source of this misery was the pleasure of the world. The goddess before whom he lay prostrate entwined the poet with the glowing arms of sense. He had sacrificed all to her—body, soul, conscience, reason, heart, and harp. "Once," he groaned, "I fancied, with Hegel, I was a god; now I know I am a sick, forgotten Jew." Sixteen years, filled with unexampled pains, followed, but it was only a transitory glance of faith to which the poet attained. On the whole, affliction only excited him to new blasphemies.—*Otto Funcke.*

Justice and mercy. Terror is subservient to love. As a skilful painter fills the background of his picture with his darker colours, so God introduces the black thunder-clouds of Sinai to give brighter prominence to Jesus, the Cross of Calvary, and His love to the chief of sinners.—*Guthrie.*

Youth. Youth and white paper take any impression. The young are the divinely-appointed heirs of the great past, and the fathers of the sublime future.

— Perhaps as the Creator looks down on this world, whose wondrous beauty beams on us more and more in proportion as our science would take it from poetry into law, He beholds nothing so beautiful as the pure heart of a simple, loving child.—*Lytton.*

Human fickleness a disappointment.

Astronomers tell us that temporary stars attain their maximum brightness only once and for all. They burst into brilliance suddenly, come to a point, continue at that point only for a short time, and then vanish, either by exploding or by coming into collision with another body. It is difficult to see the reason for their existence at all, except to show that the steady, dependable light of the permanent star is of more service in the heavens than the flashing brilliance that dazzles only to confuse and mislead. It is dangerous to be star of any kind, whether pulpit star, political star, or social star; but to be a temporary star is the most provoking and disappointing of all.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Human fickleness and its contrast. At a trial in Anglesey the heroic devotion of a wife and the base fickleness and savagery of a husband were painfully illustrated. The prisoner saved his neck through the self-forgetful devotion of his wife, who sat at his side, pale and suffering, through the trial. If it had been known that the third bullet fired from his pistol was even then lodging in the body of his faithful wife, nothing would have saved his life. It was only after the miserable man had been convicted of murder in a minor degree that did not involve hanging that she applied to a doctor, confessed that her husband had shot her, and that the bullet was still in her hip. Who can fathom a woman's love and devotion? It is often strangely lavished on those who deserve it least.—*Ibid.*

Penitence involves confession of sin. Sometimes a prisoner is advised to plead not guilty because his advocate has discovered a flaw in the indictment, or a weak place in the chain of evidence, and he may get the benefit of the doubt. Not so in the case of the sinner; there can be no doubt. The evidence is cumulative. He is caught red-handed in the act of sin. His only hope for mercy is in a full and frank confession.

How enmity is manufactured. "Right must right remain," says the farmer, and goes to law with his neighbour about a strip of pasture-land a quarter of a yard wide, and enmity and hatred exist between the two families for whole decades, while a thousand times the value of the disputed strip is lost over it. But no matter; "Right must right remain." Nor is it only among farmers, but among all kinds of people that such foolish and unhappy litigation takes place, just because no one chooses to give way; nay, not even to submit to the judgment of an umpire. "Right must right remain," says A, and passionately disputes in a large party with B as to whether the train which ran two years ago to H—— in the evening was an ordinary or an express train; and this wretched stubbornness in disputing about trifles destroys the sociability of men who ought to have brought light and salt to each other. "Right must right remain," says this respectable man. He was offended by the harsh words of another, and has now passed him coldly by for years. "He must first apologise," he says, instead of saying, "Don't let us please the devil by hating one another; here is my hand; we are brethren and heirs of one heaven." No! "Right must right remain."—*Otto Funcke.*

Retribution. The certainty that unrepentant wickedness will be punished may be argued—1. From the principle of moral causation. God has established such a connection between character and condition that misery must ever spring from sin, and blessedness from virtue. Our present grows out of the past, hence our sins must find us out. What we morally sowed yesterday we reap in experience to-day, and so on for ever. 2. From the operation of moral memory. Memory recalls sins, places them before the eye of conscience, and sets the soul aflame. 3. From the declarations of Scripture. "The wicked shall not go unpunished. The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God." 4. From the history of mankind. Nations are an example — the Antediluvians, the Sodomites, the Jews. Individuals are an example.—Moses, David, Judas.—*D. Thomas, D.D.*

CHAPTER II.

The Punishment of National Sin.

In this second elegy the poet has his attention fixed on something that is beyond Chaldean and Jew. He sees, what the eyes of the world do not see, that the hand of the invisible Governor of all nations is directing both oppressor and oppressed, and is at work to show that no force and no victory, no disaster and no shame, were aimless happenings. He is to be regarded as the real agent in producing the various events referred to. His righteous judgments are not deferred to a future state: they are issued in this life against *all unrighteousness of men*, and from Him alone can relief and instruction be obtained. So throughout the song is heard the refrain that the Lord Jehovah is supreme over all the forces of the world, and over all that those forces seem to accomplish. In face of the great Babylonian power, boastful of its victories and material grandeur, deeming itself at liberty to harry, enslave, kill for its own selfish interests; in face of his ruined city and desecrated Temple, of starving children and slaughtered chiefs, the writer holds up the fact that these are not independent potentates fixing their own terms; that they are but messengers of the Lord, who *doeth according to His will, in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth*, and who is preparing ways for the triumph of His free mercy and unstained holiness. "This Hebrew was saved from the terrible conclusion that the selfish, cruel force, which in his day carried all before it, was the highest power in life, simply by believing righteousness to be more exalted still." (*Smith*). Every nerve may tingle with pain, everything dear may be cut down, every step onward may seem to add another misery, but God's righteous and loving will shall make all things work together for "the far-off divine" eventualties towards "which the whole creation" is impelled.

Two principal divisions mark off the poem. The first, ver. 1–10, describes the palpable effects of the subjugation on things and persons. Ascribing these to the Lord, he passes, in the second section, to mournful utterances over the obvious desolations—harping, as grief is prone to do, on the same note—and concludes with a call for prayer to the Lord, and the form which that prayer would take in such dire straits.

(א) Ver. 1. The poet sees nature as if it were in commotion. A storm-cloud piles up over Jerusalem, shrouding with its gloom even the most commanding summit. But it is not the swirls of an inanimate force which he perceives, nor yet the rush of human passion in an army of cruel men, it is the Supreme Ruler who *hath His way in the whirlwind, and the storm of anger and strife, and the clouds of disaster are the dust of His feet.* **How doth the Lord in His anger;** anger is the acting quality which impresses its aspect on the writer's mind, as is shown by his frequent references to it—twice here, and in vers. 3, 6, 21, 22, cf. ver. 2: **cover with a cloud the daughter of Zion.** Under this expression, and the similar ones which follow, *daughter of Judah, daughter of Jerusalem*, is included inhabitants of all classes; no principle but that of poetic license apparently regulating the employment of either name. The storm-cloud has swept across the land which was called *the glory of all lands*, and **He has cast down from heaven** those arrow-like lightnings which have scathed, discomfited, and overthrown **unto the earth the glory of Israel.** The election of Israel to be the covenant people of the living God had given it a position as high above that of all other peoples *as the heavens are higher than the earth*, and this position was represented by a visible shrine—the Temple. It was *the holy and beautiful house where our fathers praised Thee*, and now it was *burned up with fire.* Nor did He **recall** any past manifestations of His presence to *stay His hand from working:* **He has not remembered His footstool;** *the footstool of our God* is closely associated with *the ark of the covenant* (1 Chron. xxviii. 2; Ps. xcix. 1, 5). The Cherubim stood over the cover of the ark, the mercy-seat, and as *God sitteth between the Cherubim*, His feet would be on the ark, yet He let this holiest of holy things be destroyed **in the day of His anger**—the day which broke amid the sounds of Divine justice going to punish evil—*the great day of Jehovah*, which Zephaniah predicted . . . *a day of wrath . . . a day of wasteness and desolation . . . a day of clouds and thick darkness.* The poet "could not have better expressed to the people the heinousness of their sins than by laying before them this fact, that God *remembered not His footstool in the day of His anger*" (*Calvin*).

(ב) Ver. 2. Faint adumbrations of the concomitants of a storm still flit across the field of vision. As a sweeping torrent **the Lord has swallowed up, and has not spared, all the habitations of Jacob,** including all sorts of country residences, and pasture-lands where men like Jacob may dwell in tents and feed flocks; all unfortified and unprotected places, as distinguished from fortresses in following parallel line; **He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah;** the whole military power has gone under, also the governing power **he has cast to the earth,** thus making them *lick the dust* and be trod upon by passers-by; **He has profaned the kingdom,** the royal house, **and its princes:** similarly it is said (Ps. lxxxix. 39), *Thou hast profaned His crown* [*casting it*] *to the ground*—the crown of His *anointed*, whom he had *cast off and rejected* (ver. 38). The tenor of Bible-teaching is to the effect that men by sin affect the materials which they use, and so not only the sinners themselves, but their dwellings, their goods, their plots of ground, their munitions, their governments, are scourged

by the wrath of God, in order to purify them from the pollution which has been infiltrated into them by human guilt.

(3) Ver. 3. Three forms of disaster are specified. **He has cut off in fierce anger every horn of Israel**: the horn being used as a symbol of strength or power, then all that was regarded as a strength to the life of Israel, whether warlike men or arsenals of offensive and defensive weapons, has perished. Power of resistance is removed. **He has drawn back His right hand from the face of the enemy**; He does not *pluck it out of His bosom* to help His people, and to impede and rout the foes in their attacks. Aid is withheld. **And He has burned in Jacob like a blazing fire, devouring round about**: His anger, as it were, kindled a conflagration which has consumed all it touched. Consequent on strength gone and help refused, there is blank devastation.

(7) Ver. 4. If a human enemy has wreaked his vengeance on Israel, the Lord Himself has *turned to be their enemy, and fought against them* as an armed man. **He has bent His bow as an enemy standing, [as to] His right hand as an adversary.** This ambiguous phrase seems to convey the idea that the Lord, *like a man of war*, had taken a hostile attitude and operation, so that He has slain all that was pleasant to the eye, everything esteemed was deprived of their qualities to please. **On the tent of the daughter of Zion He has poured out as fire His fury.** Jerusalem as the dwelling-place of its inhabitants has been searched and scorched with *the spirit of justice and spirit of burning.*

The preceding highly metaphorical expressions are suggestive; they show that the poet saw, what the men of his day, what the men of later days have failed to see aright, that the course of human life is aglow with *the devouring fire* of the holiness of God. *The light of Israel is for a fire and his Holy One for a flame.* Jews might have felt that the Chaldeans and others had made their land as *a desolate wilderness;* we might feel that, when we are worsted in "the struggle for life," our "environment" has been unfavourable to us. Our *eyes are holden*, and we do not perceive that the righteousness of God is the grand factor in all defeats, all crashes, all panics, all losses; using bad things, as fuel is used, to produce a fierce heat which shall eat away all that is burnable. Not only on the other side of death is the *unquenchable fire* scorching sin; that fire is kindled and burning here and now. No screen can ward off the indignation of the just and holy Lord; the ashes of ruined fortunes, reputations, impurities, self-seekings, prove that *the breath of the Lord has kindled a fire* to run through human society as intense, as overwhelming as a stream of liquid lava. *For our God is a consuming fire.*

(7) Ver. 5. Hostilities were continued in other methods. **The Lord has become as an enemy, has swallowed up Israel**; the national is submerged. This is indicated by material evidence; **He has swallowed up all her palaces**, the great houses of the daughter of Zion; **He has destroyed all His strongholds**, the fortified places which had been garrisoned by the people, **and He has multiplied in the daughter of Judah moaning and bemoaning.** Two words, which are derived from the same Hebrew root, and similar in sound, express the manifold and intense sorrows which had been experienced.

(1) Ver. 6. The dwelling-place of Jehovah on Mount Zion, which He claims as His own possession, with all its appointed services, has shared in the tribulations. **He has treated violently, as a garden, His booth.** The references in vers. 6 and 7 being to the methods of Divine worship, the reference here will be to the Temple. *He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men*, and instead of this, *in Salem was His tabernacle* = booth, but it also had come to be only a temporary *habitation for the mighty God:* that which He had sanctified had been profaned by the inroads of unsanctified men. As *a booth in a vineyard* is dismantled when the vintage is ingathered, so the stately Temple was contumeliously broken down. The Septuagint reading, *He tore up His tabernacle as a vine*, harmonises with the idea of the Hebrew phrase, viz., that the House of the Lord was laid waste. Consequent on this, **He has destroyed his [place of] solemn assembly**, where He met with His people and blessed them; following this came awful manifestations of indifference even to the helps to serving the Lord. The covenant God **Jehovah has caused to be forgotten in Zion solemn assembly and sabbath**; the annual and weekly services were no longer in the minds of His professed people. The old ritual was unavailable. Communion with one another and communion with God through established religious forms were altogether in abeyance. They had to be taught that *that which decayeth and waxeth aged* is to be replaced by a new covenant in which the service of men, and the service of God would not be by ordered rules, but by *love in the spirit.* The persons also who had been officially prominent in Temple-services were swept off the stage; **He has despised**, set no store by, **in the vehemence of His anger, king and priest.** The priesthood was indispensable to the Temple-worship till *there ariseth another Priest, made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.* The connection of royalty with the Temple is thus explained by Oehler: "The Israelitish kingdom, especially in David and Solomon, bears a certain sacerdotal character, inasmuch as the king, at the head of the people and in their name, pays homage to God and brings back again to the people the blessings of God." This, however, is defective in statement. What was done by the king was not done in any priestly capacity, but as being the chief member of the sacerdotal people. They were *a kingdom of priests unto* Jehovah. Besides, it was done as representative of the Davidic monarchy, with which the building and continuance of services in the house of the Lord were closely linked

(Jer. xxxiii. 21). Viewed in this light, the lamentation is, that Jehovah has rejected both the royal family of David and the Levitical priesthood.

(ז) Ver. 7. There has been entire desecration of the holy places. **The Lord has cast off his altar**, the appointed erection on which *burnt-offerings and sacrifices* were presented to Him, and which should come up *with acceptance* there. There was no standing for such action now. He had abandoned it—its fires were quenched and cold: **he has abhorred his sanctuary**, the whole enclosure of the holy places. But there all is not still; **He has put into the hand of her enemy the walls of her palaces**, the crowning buildings of Mount Zion have been delivered up to hostile people, and **they have given voice in the house of the Lord**; a victorious multitude made within the glory-hallowed precincts such a jubilant noise as [in] **a day of a solemn assembly**, but the clamour was the clamour of ruthless conquerors, not of rejoicing worshippers.

(ח) Ver. 8. Jeremiah relates (chap. lii. 14) that *all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem round about.* This was from no mere chance of warfare, no shrewd decision of the commander of the invaders; it was from the predetermination of the God of Israel. **Jehovah has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion.** It was carried out according as He incited or restrained the agents of its accomplishment: **he has stretched out the** [measuring] **line**, and until His limitations were reached **he has not withdrawn his hand from overthrowing**. Every division of the fortifications has suffered, **and he has made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languish together.** All calamities have their methods and boundaries fixed by the All-wise. They do not form a chaos, brought about by natural forces or human power. They are in an exact order, and proceed to a verge which He has appointed. They are pregnant with gigantic issues.

(ט) Ver. 9. Traces of the best constructed part of the wall have disappeared, covered with debris. **Her gates have sunk into the earth**; the very means of fastening them are in fragments; **he has destroyed and broken her bars.** Like that had befallen the political and religious barriers which separated her from other peoples. **Her king and princes are among the nations**, swept away into exile. With the removal of civil authorities self-seeking and anarchy had supervened. God's rule of life, which required Temple and altar for its material symbol, exists no more for the people; **there is no law.** Still more sad, the proofs of the Lord's guidance had been withheld; **even her prophets find no vision from Jehovah** to bring help and comfort. There might be prophets, but they received no *burden of the Lord.* He will put aside for a time His means of grace, if they cease to answer Divine ends.

(י) Ver. 10. Two classes, who were exponents of the intelligence and joy of the people, prostrated like the rest, are no longer capable of acting their parts. **They sit on the ground, are silent, the elders of the daughter of Zion**; they exhibit other profound tokens of overwhelming sufferings. "Small griefs are eloquent—great ones are dumb." Also among the ruins **they hang down their heads to the ground, the virgins of Jerusalem**; the song, the timbrel, the dance, have all been abandoned as vain things.

The retrospect of the poet, which had brought before him one sad scene after another in the destruction of the Jewish state, and the desperate lot of various classes of its people, produced a turmoil of emotions in himself, and appeals to men and God to join in his lamentations.

(כ) Ver. 11. So exasperating is his misery that he feels as if organic parts of his body were dismembered. **My eyes fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the ground**—an effect of terrible grief, showing how body and soul are sympathetic with each other **over the breach of the daughter of my people.** This shattered condition was replete with the harrowing details of suffering, as **when the young children and the sucklings faint in the streets of the city.**

(ל) Ver. 12. His ears heard their piteous cravings, while **to their mothers they are saying, Where is corn and wine**, solid and liquid nourishment. Even when listening, his eyes saw the older children **faint as the wounded in the streets of the city**, and infants in arms **poured their souls into their mother's bosom**, which could supply no aliment.

(מ) Ver. 13. He is ready, as a servant of the All-merciful and All-wise, to speak on His behalf, so as to alleviate the clamant wretchedness; but he feels unable. **What shall I testify to thee?** No message is given to him from the Most High, and no resemblance to her condition is perceptible on the broad surface of past or present human life. **What liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem?** The case is unparalleled, and there are no lessons applicable. **What shall I compare to thee and comfort thee** [with], **O virgin daughter of Zion? For great is thy breach like the sea. Who will heal thee?** Ruin had extended as far as to the horizon of the people's existence, and to the deep springs of thought. True, there had not been wanting men who professed to be commissioned by Jehovah to declare that all would be well. *They healed the hurt*—the word here translated *breach*—*of the daughter of my people lightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.*

(נ) Ver. 14. The Book of Jeremiah contains ample evidence as to who those *miserable comforters* were. It shows that, during the period just preceding the overthrow of Judæa, there were a number of persons who were accustomed glibly to say, *The burden of Jehovah*, but who were mere pretenders to divine visions, who gave chaff and not wheat. The reason lay in the character of the people, that formed its own instruments in politics and religion. If a people prefer to have sensational statesmen, such statesmen will appear. If prophets prophecy falsely,

it is because the *people love to have it so.* They *say unto the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits.* They got what they wanted. **Thy prophets have seen for thee,** and the result is **vanity and foolishness,** unreal and unreasonable things. They did not make known the will of God so as to expose the evil ways and doings of the people, and prepare for amendment. **They have not uncovered thine iniquity to turn away thy captivity.** Instead of that, their boasted visions tended to produce **burdens of vanity and causes of banishment.** *They prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land, and that I should drive you out.*

(ד) Ver. 15. Casual strangers on their travels felt glad at sight of desolated Jerusalem. **They clap their hands at thee, all who pass by the way,** and add scorn to gladness; **they hiss and wag their head.** They use sarcasm, **Is this the city which they called the perfection of beauty, a joy to the whole earth?** So the glorying of the Jews is turned into a reproach and shame.

(ה) Ver. 16. A similar but wider view is presented than in the preceding verse. **Not** strangers, but **all thine enemies,** filled with mockery and exultation, **have opened their mouth against thee.** There is testimony in the Psalms as to how Orientals can *belch out with their mouth.* Abrupt utterances follow, and intimate how excited and impassioned they were. **We have swallowed up. Hah! this is the day which we have expected, have found, have seen.** Now at length we see what we sought, get what we wanted.

(ו) Ver. 17. Whatever are the calamities suffered, whatever the taunts to which the people are exposed in their ruined condition, they have not come from the onslaught of ruthless foes, but from God, their own God. That was the final fact of the catastrophe which had overwhelmed them. It is not the generalisations, called "laws," which make history what it is, but the will of "the living Lord." He controls all existences, and His methods with them are always definite and consistent. *Not one faileth.* **Jehovah has done that which he purposed; he has fulfilled his word which he commanded from the days of old.** Compare Lev. xxvi. 14 ff; Deut. xxviii. 15 ff. He keeps His word. His order has been faithfully carried out in the overthrow of Jerusalem, and, giving entire power to boasting destroyers, **he has exalted the horn of thine adversaries.**

(ז) Ver. 18. **Their heart cried unto the Lord.** The cry is not to the God in covenant with Israel, but to the ruler over all nations and all matter. Yet the pronoun **their** cannot refer to the persons last spoken of. The adversaries were not likely to change their vaunts into profound sympathy. It is appropriate to suppose that there was a part, at any rate, of the downtrodden who would tell their heart-aches to the only Helper, and could not subdue the longing to see all things around them express the tokens of keenest sorrow. **O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a torrent day and night.** Bold appeals to inanimate objects for signs of interest in human affairs are not strange to prophets of Israel, and the call upon the shattered wall of Jerusalem seems grounded on the idea that it was regarded as a mother embracing in its arms the city with its blighted hopes. It was not to be stemmed and have **respite; let not the pupil** [Heb. daughter] **of the eye cease** from shedding tears.

(ח) Ver. 19. Sleep is to be interrupted in order to weep. **Arise, cry loud in the night,** and as its hours pass on, rouse up **at the beginning of the watches** into which the night is divided. Hearts that cried are to cast away all reserve **before the Lord.** They will have gone a long way towards receiving help when they recognise that He who "is strong to smite is also strong to save." They will take the attitude of prayer, **Lift up thy hands to Him,** and the first matter to request will be **the life of thy young children,** whose sad case is again mentioned, **faint for hunger at the top of every street.** Dying and dead little ones at every turn. A sight for the Creator to consider.

(ט) Ver. 20. The prayer is put into words correspondent with the circumstances. **See, Jehovah, and behold to whom thou hast done this,** to the city called thine, to the people whom thou hast chosen to be *a name and praise* to thee. How shocking are the consequences! See **if women eat their fruit, the children whom they carried.** The last word relates to that which is spread—as infants on the knees or arms. The Revised Version translates it *dandled in the hands,* which, if expressing the idea, is too special. The awful incident was a punishment threatened (Deut. xxviii. 56, 57; Jer. xix. 9). See **if there are slain in the sanctuary of the Lord priest and prophet.** His own holy place defiled with blood. If such spectacles were common, as they were, will God not stay His hand?

(י) Ver. 21. From the massacre in the Temple to the general slaughter of all ages and both sexes is another step in the dismal recital. **The youth and the old man . . . my virgins and choice young men,** were killed. It was clear that they had to bear the anger of Jehovah —that He was not only *full of compassion,* but *in righteousness he doth judge and make war* upon evil.

(כ) Ver. 22. **Thou hast called as in a day of solemn assembly,** summoning, as by trumpet, all kinds of terrifying agencies—men, famine, fire, sword—**my terrors on every side, and there was none that escaped or remained in the day of Jehovah's anger.** Then, in motherly anguish, she laments again over the children she had **carried and brought up,** whom the enemy had cruelly **consumed.** So "the poem concludes, like the first, with deep sorrow, regarding which all attempts at comfort are quite unavailing."

HOMILETICS.

The Fierceness of the Divine Anger.

(Verses 1–5.)

How wierd and sad is the lonely wail of the night-wind! How depressing the monotony of the sobbing sea! How heart-rending the ceaseless moan of the helpless sufferer! All the varying cadences of melancholy seem gathered up and interpreted in the sorrowful monody of the tender-hearted prophet. It is still the voice of lamentation that we hear: the strain, like the theme, is the same. From his elevated rocky grotto Jeremiah overlooked the ruined city, and it seemed impossible for him to turn away his gaze from the scene of destruction that fascinated while it distressed him. In this chapter he describes, with vivid realism, the harrowing circumstances connected with the siege and taking of the city. By a lofty flight of prophetic imagination he descries the awful form of the Almighty hovering over Jerusalem, wreaking vengeance on the obstinate and rebellious citizens. In this paragraph we learn that *the fierceness of the Divine anger*—

I. **Is a terrifying reality.** "The Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down the beauty of Israel" (ver. 1). The darkening cloud that portends the approaching storm fills the stoutest heart with alarm, and all nature cowers with fear under the crash of the dreadful thunder. The prophet sees the Divine anger settling upon Jerusalem like a dark thunder-cloud, and breaking in a tempest, by which the Temple is levelled to the ground. It is not the cloud that led the Israelites from bondage to freedom, but a cloud of wrath sent to punish for the aggravated abuse of that freedom. The cloud no longer guides and protects; it is now charged with the thunderbolt of retribution. The anger of God is all the more terrible when manifested towards those who once enjoyed His favour and compassion.

II. **Is irresistible in its destructiveness** (vers. 1–5). The beauty of Israel is deformed, her pride humbled, her strength paralysed, her city reduced to ashes, and her strongholds and inhabitants are remorselessly swept away Nothing can withstand the Divine power, and when that power is exerted in anger, it makes short work of the most formidable opposition. Storm, earthquake, fire, war, and all the forces of the universe, obey the bidding of the Divine Word. The enemies of God will be completely overthrown by the fierceness of His anger (Exod. xv. 7; Ps. ii. 2–5, xxi. 8–10, lxxix. 6; Isa. x. 6; Jer. x. 25; Nah. i. 2; 1 Thess. ii. 16).

III. **Intensifies the misery of its victims.** "He hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation" (ver. 5). When our miseries come upon us from our enemies, we are not surprised; it is what we expected. When we can trace them as the direct result of our own folly and sin, we know they are deserved, and we strengthen ourselves to endure them as philosophically as we can; but when the truth dawns upon us that God is against us, and it is His hand that smites us, we are startled at the discovery, and our distress is unspeakably increased. It is a bitter ingredient in the sufferings of the disobedient to know that he has provoked the anger of the God of love. The suffering Christ turns away for us the fierceness of the Divine anger.

Lessons.—1. *Persistency in wrong-doing rouses the Divine anger.* 2. *When the Divine anger is manifested, it works terrible havoc.* 3. *Timely repentance averts the worst consequences of the Divine anger.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1, 2. **The storm of the Divine wrath:** I. *Overshadows the city whose sins call for vengeance.* "How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger" (ver. 1) II. *Shatters the sanctuary where wor*

ship has been profaned. "Cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger" (ver. 1). III. *Destroys the homesteads and fortresses of a rebellious people.* "The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob. He hath thrown down in his wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah" (ver. 2). IV. *Dishonours the government that ignores the claims of righteousness.* "He hath polluted (profaned, made it common or unclean) the kingdom and the princes thereof" (ver. 2).

Ver. 3. **The defences of a nation:** I. *Exposed to the ravages of the enemy when the Divine protection is withdrawn.* "He hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy." II. *Deprived of their strength when assailed by the Divine anger.* "He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel. III. *Utterly destroyed by the wrath evoked by national sins.* "He burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about."

Vers. 4, 5. **Jehovah as an enemy:** I. *Formidable to all who obstinately resist him.* "He hath bent his bow like an enemy. He stood with his right hand as an adversary" (ver. 4). II. *Works terrible destruction.* "Slew all that were pleasant to the eye. He poured out his fury like fire. He hath swallowed up Israel" (ver. 4, 5). III. *Means augmented distress to those he punishes.* "He hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation" (ver. 5).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Neglect incurs wrath.** As the mariner takes the first wind to sail, the merchant the first opportunity of buying and selling, and the husbandman the first opportunity of sowing and reaping, so should young men take the present season, the present day, which is their day, to be good towards the Lord, to seek Him and serve Him, and not to put off the present season, for they know not what another day, another hour, another moment may bring forth. That door of grace that is open to-day may be shut to-morrow; that golden sceptre of mercy that is held forth in the Gospel this day may be taken in the next day; that love, that this hour is upon the bare knee, entreating and beseeching young men to break off their sins by repentance, to return to the Lord, to lay hold on His strength and be at peace with Him, may the next hour be turned into wrath.—*Brooks.*

— Plutarch writes of Hannibal, that when he could have taken Rome he would not, and when he would have taken Rome he could not. Many in their youthful days, when they might have mercy, Christ, pardon, peace, heaven, will not; and when old age comes on they cannot, they may not. God seems to say, as Theseus once said, "Go and tell Creon, Theseus offers thee a gracious offer. Yet I am pleased to be friends if thou wilt submit—this is my first message; but if this offer prevail not, look for me to be up in arms."

— Whatever account you have to settle with God, settle it now. There are two "nows" in Scripture which should never be separated. One stands out in the brightest rays, the other retires into deep shadows. "*Now* is the accepted time." "*Now* they are hid from Thine eyes."—*Vaughan.*

Judgment a surprise. There are sometimes some sad awakenings from sleep in this world. It is very sad to dream by night of vanished joys, to revisit old scenes and dwell once more among the unforgotten forms of our loved and lost; to see in the dreamland the old familiar look, and to hear the well-remembered tones of a voice long hushed and still, and then to awake with the morning light to the aching sense of our loneliness again. It were very sad for the poor criminal to wake from sweet dreams of other and happier days—days of innocence, hope, and peace, when kind friends and a happy home and an honoured or unstained name were his; to wake in his cell on the morning of his execution to the horrible recollection that all is gone for ever, and that to-day he must die a felon's death. But inconceivably more awful than any awakening which

earthly daybreak has ever brought shall be the awakening of the self-deluded soul when it is roused in horror and surprise from the dream of life to meet Almighty God in judgment!—*J. Caird.*

Temporary storms. It is a dark and cloudy day for you. A storm has burst upon you; but you remember how, after the storm, the bow is set in the cloud for all who look above to the Hand that smites them. The storm has come, and now we must look up and wait and watch in prayer and faith for the rainbow of promise and comfort.—*Ministering Children.*

Prolonged misery. When water takes its first leap from the top, it is cool, collected, uninteresting, mathematical: but it is when it finds that it has got into a scrape, and has further to go than it thought for, that its character comes out; it is then that it begins to writhe and twist, and sweep out zone after zone in wilder stretchings as it falls, and to send down the rocket-like, lance-pointed, whizzing shafts at its sides, sounding for the bottom.—*Ruskin.*

There is mercy in every storm. Every stroke of the rod is but the muffled voice of love; every billow bears on its bosom, and every tempest on its wing, some new and rich blessing from the better land. If the Lord were to roll the Red Sea before us and marshal the Egyptians behind us, and thus, hemming us in on every side, should yet bid us advance, it would be the duty and the privilege of faith instantly to obey, believing that, ere our feet touched the water, God in our extremity would divide the sea and take us dryshod over it. If for a moment we leave the path, difficulties throng around us, troubles multiply, the smallest trials become heavy crosses, the heart will sicken at disappointment, the Spirit be grieved, and God disappointed. —*Winslow.*

Goodness a nation's defence. Abijah's goodness was towards the Lord; his goodness faced the Lord; it looked towards the glory of the Lord. It is recorded of the Catanenses that they made a stately monument to two sons who took their aged parents upon their backs and carried them through the fire when their father's house was all in a flame. These young men were good towards their parents; but what is this to Abijah's goodness towards the Lord? He was good in the house of Jeroboam, who made all Israel to sin; yet Abijah, as the fishes which live in the salt sea are fresh, so, though he lived in a sea of wickedness, he retained his goodness towards the Lord. They say roses grow the sweeter when planted by garlic. They are sweet and rare Christians indeed who hold their goodness and grow in goodness where wickedness sits on the throne. To be wheat among tares, corn among chaff, and roses among thorns, is excellent. To be a Jonathan in Saul's court, an Obadiah in Ahab's court, an Obedmelech in Zedekiah's court, and an Abijah in Jeroboam's court, is a wonder, a miracle. To be a Lot in Sodom, an Abraham in Chaldea, a Daniel in Babylon, a Nehemiah in Damascus, and a Job in the land of Uz, is to be a saint among devils. The poets affirm that Venus never appeared so beautiful as when she sat by black Vulcan's side. Gracious souls shine most clear when they are set by black-conditioned people. Stephen's face never shone so angelically, so gloriously in the church where all were virtuous, as before the council where all were very vicious and malicious. So Abijah was a bright star, a shining sun in Jeroboam's court, which for profaneness and wickedness was a very hell.

— A substantial fence has been erected enclosing the relic of the Covenanter's stone on the summit of Duns Law. On this historic spot the standard of the Covenanting army under General Leslie was planted, and on the stone a copy of the National League and Covenant signed by the resolute leaders on the 6th June 1639. At one time the stone was prominently seen, but it is now so much reduced by the chipping and hacking of Vandalic visitors as to be scarcely visible above the green sward. Scotland has good reason to be proud of the brave exploits of its ancestors, who, whatever their

failings, were men of earnest purpose, and fought for those principles of right and justice which helped to make possible the national life of to-day. The records and memorials of their deeds should be a constant stimulus to imitate their noblest qualities. "Remove not the ancient landmarks which thy fathers have set."—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Satan an enemy: but what of Jehovah? Satan is the enemy of every saint, and he is an indefatigable enemy. He never tires in his temptations to ensnare souls to destroy them. He "walketh about seeking whom he may devour." This denotes his main object is to ruin the souls of men, and that he does it in a deliberate, calm, systematic way. He walks about observing times, places, circumstances, characters—all with a view to devour. He does as a lion, to whom he is compared. Observe his gentle tread, his fiery, searching eye, his subtle plans, his secret ambushes, his hidden schemes, his concealed name, nature, and character; and when he spies one of whom he can take advantage, see how the lion-nature is developed in the rush, the pounce, the seizure, the tearing, the destruction. But what must it be to the sinner to find an enemy in Jehovah?

HOMILETICS.

The Wreck of Religious Ordinances.

(Verses 6–9.)

I. **The Temple is completely demolished** (vers. 6–8). In a city where there are many temples the destruction of one creates only a temporary inconvenience. Jerusalem, and indeed the Jewish nation, had but one temple, and it had the special distinction of being the only temple in the world dedicated to the worship of Jehovah. It was always in the past, and is to this day, reverently referred to as *the* Temple. It was idolised by the Jew, and was regarded as beyond the reach of possible injury. It was encircled with the rampart of Omnipotence. When menaced by the enemy, the people rallied round the sacred fane, prepared to sacrifice everything in its defence. Here they made their last stand, and fought with the fury of fanatics. But their zeal, bravery, and strategy were all in vain. In their blind infatuation they saw not that the only invincible defence, the presence of Jehovah, was withdrawn. The Temple was doomed, and was reduced to ruin with the same reckless indifference as a man would tear down a temporary shelter in his garden (ver. 6). The gates, walls, palaces, altar, sanctuary, were abandoned to utter destruction (vers. 7–9). The wreckage of such a temple was not only a metropolitan, but a national calamity. Everything was gone when the Temple was gone.

II. **The religious services, formerly observed with uninterrupted regularity, are now utterly neglected.** "The Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion" (ver. 6). The annual and the weekly festivals are no longer observed. "There is an intensive force in its being no longer Adonai, but Jehovah, who lets them pass into oblivion. He had once instituted them for His own honour, now He lets them lie forgotten." When religion is neglected, all days are alike; there is nothing to mark off Sabbath-days from week-days, sacred days from common days. Life is reduced to the dead level of dull monotony, and the days drag on in the weary routine of comfortless and aimless labour.

"He liveth long who liveth well—
All else is being flung away;
He liveth longest who can tell
Of true things truly done each day."

Intellectual pursuits and activity are a poor substitute for genuine religion. Education not founded on religion is only a varnish. Abolish the Sabbath and

the decay of religion begins. A poet calls the Sabbath "Heaven once a week." Day of rest, of days the best.

III. **The principal worshippers are in exile.** "Her king and her princes are among the Gentiles" (ver. 9). The prophet has been principally occupied with the buildings of the city and Temple. Now he turns to the people, and beginning with their temporary rulers, he laments the sad fate of the king and princes who, no longer seen taking their part in the Temple service, were, like many of their people, captives in the hands of the heathen. With the best external aids it is difficult to maintain the spirituality of worship; but that difficulty is increased when all external accessories are withdrawn, and man is placed in the midst of irreligious heathenism. If he does not strive to propagate what religion he has, he will lose it. To love and worship God we must know Him, and this we cannot do till He graciously reveals Himself. The astronomer seeking to observe a star, can do nothing till he directs his telescope towards the star. The dim light of evening is with him, and by it he sets the telescope and guides it to the proper point in the heavens. But when he has pointed it to the star, the light of the star streams into the telescope, lighting it up with a new and brighter illumination. The soul of man is a telescope by which he is seeking to see and know God. The general illumination of the heart is in the world. All pagans have it. But when man has adjusted the lenses of the soul, God flashes down it, and produces an image of Himself in the poor earthly tube.

IV. **The Law and the Prophets are discredited.** "The law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the Lord" (ver. 9). The Jewish law, the Torah, came to an end when it had no longer a local habitation. Its enactments were essentially those, not of a catholic, but of a national religion, and the restoration of the nation with a material temple was indispensable to its continued existence. It was only when elevated to be a catholic religion by being made spiritual that it could do without ark, temple, and a separate people (Jer. iii. 16, xxxi. 31–34). With the Torah the special gift of prophecy also ceased, since both were peculiar to the theocracy; but it was not till the establishment of Christianity that they were finally withdrawn, or rather merged in higher developments of grace. Jeremiah now laments over the temporary removal of Judah's special privileges before they had accomplished their office. At the return from exile they were for the time restored.—*Speaker's Comm.*

It is a grave calamity to church or nation to be deprived of men of insight and inspiration. These men give direction and character to the best work we are capable of doing. Much of the work of the world is done in a perfunctory manner—done to get through with it, done to get it off one's mind, done to secure the return which it promises. It is done without enthusiasm, originality, or contagious zeal. The men who give their work character, distinction, perfection, are the men whose spirit is behind their hands, giving them a new dexterity. There is no kind of work, from the merest routine to the highest creative activity, which does not receive all that gives it quality from the spirit in which it is done or fashioned. The highest and best work is done when the soul receives its "vision from the Lord" and is animated by His inspiration.

LESSONS.—1. *Religion seeks practical expression in worship and service.* 2. *The loss of religious ordinances is a national calamity.* 3. *The abuse of religious opportunities is punished by their withdrawal.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 6. "He hath violently taken away **his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden; He hath destroyed His places of the assembly.**" **The earthly temple:** 1. Is but a temporary structure, however elaborately built. 2. Is desecrated when a false worship is offered. 3. When defiled, is suddenly destroyed,

as a man may tear down in a few moments a fragile hut erected for his temporary pleasure in a garden. 4. Its destruction suggests reflections on man's unfaithfulness and God's anger.

— **Perverted worship**: I. *Involves the loss of stated privileges.* "The Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion." II. *Rouses the Divine displeasure.* "The indignation of His anger." III. *Entails regal and ecclesiastical dishonour.* "And hath despised the king and the priest."

Ver. 7. **A despised sanctuary**: I. *Its holiest places rejected with disdain by an offended Deity.* "The Lord hath cut off his altar; he hath abhorred his sanctuary." II. *Completely abandoned to destruction.* "He hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces." III. *The wild shouts of its destroyers a strange contrast to the exultant joy of former worshippers.* "They have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn feast."

Ver. 8. **The implacable destroyer**: I. *Works in harmony with a fixed determination.* "The Lord hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion." II. *Carries out his purpose with systematic thoroughness.* "He hath stretched out a line; he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying." III. *Lays the strongest defences in lamentable ruin.* "Therefore he hath made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together."

Ver. 9. **National ruin complete**: I. *When all public buildings are destroyed.* "Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars." II. *When the rulers are in exile.* "Her king and her princes are among the Gentiles." III. *When religious ordinances are suspended.* "The law is no more." IV. *When religious teachers are deprived of Divine inspiration.* "Her prophets also find no vision from the Lord."

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Undercurrents cause wrecks.** A ship was stranded on the island of Sanda, in the Orkneys. It was a mystery to the captain how the vessel got there. Being foggy at the time, he carefully consulted his chart, and both he and the mate worked up the position, their reckonings exactly agreeing as to latitude, but differing slightly in longitude. The captain had navigated the ship for ten years without any misfortune. He attributed the accident to the force of an undercurrent which carried him unknowingly out of his course, and learnt afterwards from fishermen in the locality that a current was frequently felt in that sea as far as sixty miles from land. The sea of life is intersected with dangerous undercurrents, and the watchful student will be careful to watch their tendency and strength. While on the fringe of the current, it is comparatively easy to escape, but if we drift into the midst of the irresistible swirl, we shall be hurried on to inevitable disaster. You have seen the tiny snowflakes flutter about the railway track, like lovely bits of down shook from angelic wings, and you have seen with what ease the proud locomotive scatters the fleecy morsels in the early stages of the storm; but the falling atoms increase with such persistent rapidity and accumulative force, that the panting engine is at length completely strangled, and, utterly exhausted, lies buried fathoms deep beneath the crystal mound.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Ordinances help religious life. Grace is like a spark in wet wood, that needs continual blowing. Would you have and keep up ardent desires? Do as they that would keep in the fire; cherish the sparks and blow them up to a flame. There is no man lives under the means of grace and under the discoveries of God and religion but has his good moods and lively motions. The waters are stirred many times; take hold of this advantage. Strengthen the things that remain and are ready to die, and blow up these sparks into a flame. God has left us enkindling means—prayer, meditation, and the Word. Observe where the bellows blow hardest, and ply that course. The more supernatural things are, there needs more diligence to preserve them. A strange plant

needs more care than a native of the soil. Worldly desires, like a nettle, breed of their own accord, but spiritual desires need a great deal of cultivating. —*Manton.*

— The Christian is compared to a merchantman who trades for rich pearls; he is to go to ordinances as the merchant sails from port to port, not to see places, but to take in his lading, some here, some there. A Christian should be as much ashamed to return empty from his traffic with ordinances as the merchant to come home without his lading. But, alas! how little is this looked after by many that pass for great professors, who are like some idle persons, that come to the market not to buy provision and carry home what they want, but to gaze and look upon what is there to be sold, to no purpose! O my brethren, take heed of this!—*Gurnall.*

The earthly temple and perverted worship. There is a great difference between religiousness and religion. Man is a religious animal, he must and will worship something. But the religion which the Bible teaches is a total change of the heart, and of the aim and purpose of life.—*Calthrop.*

— Believers are in danger of seduction into the sin and falsehood of the world. The world threatens believers not only with its enmity, but evermore with its temptations. Believers must be warned to shun the idols the world worships, and they are warned against love to the world, because love in that way very easily gets associated with sinful lusts, which are common in the world. In false prophecy it is shown that the devil, who was a murderer and liar from the beginning, threatens the Church, not only with the deadly enmity of the world, but also with its soul-destroying lies. We cannot show brotherly love to false teachers without running the risk of making ourselves partakers in their sins.—*Weiss.*

— Means—the table of the Lord, the pulpit, the pages of the Bible, the family altar, the closet oratory—are of no value unless as putting us in communication with the Spirit of God, and used as the kite which the philosopher sends up to draw down the lightnings of the skies, or the bucket which the cottager sends down to draw up water from the well. Then, powerless as they are in themselves, they become the blessed and mighty instrument of spiritual good; the sails that catch the wind and impel the vessel on; the concave mirror that, placed before the Sun of Righteousness, gathers His beams into its burning focus to warm the coldest and melt the hardest heart; eagle-wings to raise our souls to heaven; conduits, like the pipes that bring water to our city from these Pentland Hills, to convey streams of grace, peace, and purity from their fountain in heaven to our souls on earth.—*Guthrie.*

A despised sanctuary. Those that turn their backs on God's ordinances and, in rebellion to His commandments, live in sins against conscience, can they wonder that He hides His face from them when they turn their backs on Him? When we sin, we turn our backs upon God and our face to the devil, the world, and pleasure; and can men wonder that God suffers them to melt and pine away? Let us do as the flowers do, turn themselves to the sun. Let us turn ourselves to God in meditation and prayer, striving and wrestling with Him. Look to Him, eye Him in His ordinances and promises, and have communion with Him all the ways we can. Let our souls open and shut with Him. When He hides His face, let us droop as the flowers do till the sun comes again. So, when we have not daily comfort of the Spirit in peace of conscience, let us never rest seeking God's face in His ordinances and by prayer, and that will cheer a drooping soul as the sunbeams do the flagging flowers.—*Sibbes.*

Retribution implacable. Fatalism and Atheism are preached constantly amidst the plaudits of ignorant Englishmen. How many politicians deem the matter a thing of the slightest consequence! Hume would never have set cities on fire, beheaded or hacked to pieces human beings, least of all the refined, the noble, the educated; but

he must be reckoned among those who sneeringly scattered smouldering embers and bequeathed to others death by the inevitable conflagration. Seldom has the logic of events been more complete than in the great French Revolution.—*Bampton Lecture.*

— What a diabolical invention was the "Virgin's Kiss," once used by the fathers of the Inquisition! The victim was pushed forward to kiss the image, when, lo! its arms embraced him in a deadly embrace, piercing his body with a hundred hidden knives. The tempting pleasures of sin offer to the unwary just such a virgin's kiss. The sinful joys of the flesh lead, even in this world, to results most terrible, while in the world to come the daggers of remorse and despair will cut and wound beyond all remedy.—*Spurgeon.*

— Crime and punishment grow out of one stem. Punishment is a fruit that unsuspected ripens within the flower of the pleasure that concealed it.—*Emerson.*

National ruin. The whole history of Christianity shows that she is in far greater danger of being corrupted by the alliance of power than of being crushed by its opposition. Those who thrust temporal sovereignty upon her treat her as her prototypes treated her Author. They bow the knee, and spit upon her; they cry, "Hail!" and smite her on the cheek; they put a sceptre in her hand, but it is a fragile reed; they crown her, but it is with thorns; they cover with purple the wounds which their own hands have inflicted, and inscribe magnificent letters over the cross on which they have fixed her, to perish in ignominy and pain.—*Macaulay.*

— Human society reposes on religion. Civilisation without it would be like the lights that play in the northern sky—a momentary flash on the face of darkness ere it again settled into eternal night. Wit and wisdom, sublime poetry and lofty philosophy, cannot save a nation, else ancient Greece had never perished. Valour, law, ambition, cannot preserve a people, else Rome had still been mistress of the world. The nation that loses faith in God and man loses not only its most precious jewel, but its most unifying and conserving force; has before it a

> "Stygian cave forlorn
> Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,
> And the night-raven sings."
>
> —*Fairbairn.*

HOMILETICS.

VOICELESS WOE.

(Verse 10.)

I. **Too deep for words.** "The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground and keep silence." A graphic description of sympathy and sorrow. The judges and magistrates, accustomed to occupy with dignity the judgment-seats, the thrones of the house of David, and to discourse eloquently on important points of law, now sit dejectedly upon the ground, without uttering a word. It was thus that the friends of the afflicted Job silently expressed their sympathy (Job ii. 13). There is a moment in the swing of a great sorrow when speech seems impossible—when words, if spoken, would grate upon the ear as a harsh intrusion. We prefer to be left alone and undisturbed till the pressure of the trial is relieved. We are distraught, stunned, and want time to come to ourselves. The most delicate and effectual way in which our kindest friends can help us is to be silent. No words can express our sorrow. Small griefs are eloquent enough, but great ones are dumb.

II. **Expressed in abject humiliation.** "They have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth." They are stripped of their robes of state, and all their judicial dignities and prestige. They have lost their

offices and their wealth. Greatness and prosperity are exchanged for sackcloth and ashes. The loss of worldly goods brings sorrow to many. An old Latin proverb says, "Genuine are the tears shed over lost property." Those who have boasted most about their possessions, and carried their heads high in times of plenty, feel most keenly the humiliating straits of poverty. But how crushing is the humiliation when we realise we have lost all—our wealth, our friends, our national status, our religion, our God! Such a woe is voiceless indeed.

III. Overwhelms the soul with conscious shame. "The virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground." Time was when the haughty daughters of Zion courted public admiration as they tripped mincingly along the streets of Jerusalem, decked in richest apparel, and their every movement musical with tinkling ornaments (Isa. iii. 16); but now their pride is humbled, and they are bowed to the earth with conscious shame. And yet it is from this broken and dejected condition we trace the beginning of better things. It is on crushed grain that man is fed; it is by bruised plants that he is restored to health. It was by broken pitchers that Gideon triumphed; on broken pieces of the ship that Paul and his companions were saved. It was by the bruised and torn bodies of the saints that the truth was made to triumph. When we examine the process of moral reform in nations and individuals, we observe how effectually God has used many broken things in the rebuilding of a shattered character—broken earthly hopes, broken bodily health, broken fortunes, broken hearts. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. li. 17, xxxiv. 18).

LESSONS.—1. *The greatest sorrow is speechless.* 2. *A sense of sin is a sense of personal helplessness.* 3. *The grace of God can change the greatest woe into hope and gladness.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**The loneliness of woe.** You are tried alone, alone you must pass into the desert, alone you must be sifted by the world; there are moments, known only to a man's own self, when he sits by the poisoned springs of existence, "yearning for a morrow which shall free him from the strife." Let life be a life of faith; do not go timorously about inquiring what others think, what others believe, and what others say. God is near you. Throw yourself fearlessly on Him. Trembling mortal! there is an unknown might within your soul which will wake when you command it. Every son of man who would attain the true end of his being must be baptized with fire.—*F. W. Robertson.*

Dejection and despair. The more sin and corruption grow, and the man becomes fully conscious of it, the more does dejection grow also, and this changes at last into despair, which is a state of entire hopelessness, where all possibilities have vanished, all gates and ways are closed to a man. There is a despair for a hard fate, and it not seldom happens that a man, in consequence of a single severe stroke, makes a sudden leap from his natural state of security into a state of despair, be it that he has lost a beloved human being, or his means, or in any other misfortune. Against this form of despair even heathenism had a remedy—resignation, submission to the inevitable. But the deepest despair is when a man gives up hope, not merely for this or that which he called his own, but for *himself* as a moral being. There is one sustaining and saving power—faith in God. Despair may and should become the transition to salvation, if the man only despairs of himself, but does not give up his God. In the expression of entire inability, of deepest helplessness—"O wretched man that I am"—there is latent a hope of redemption, the hope that what is impossible with man is possible with God.—*Martensen.*

The ravages of suffering. After the relief of the city of Paris, the strain and fatigue through which M. —— had gone told seriously upon his health. He could not forget the horrors he had

witnessed. His face began to look worn. His hair became greyer. He looked depressed. His usual cheerful and buoyant energy disappeared, and he became listless, self-absorbed, and melancholy.

Depression. Just before George Moore's entrance into his palatial house in Cumberland, his wife died. This brought an almost intolerable sense of loneliness. One day, going to see an intimate friend, he said, "How blessed is he amidst his lovely family! I wonder whether *he* has a coffin in any cupboard."

Solitude oppressive. When Thomas, the missionary to India, reached Calcutta, he was oppressed with a sense of loneliness. He put an advertisement in the newspapers asking if there was another Christian in the country, and begging for an interview. But there was no answer!

HOMILETICS.

The Utter Exhaustion of Grief.

(Verses 11, 12.)

I. Because of the hopelessness of the desolation endured. "For the destruction of the daughter of my people" (ver. 11). The desolation is complete. Everything is destroyed—Temple, home, army, nation, wealth, food, and the very capacity to rouse themselves from the torpor of despair. When the light of hope is quenched it is impossible to put forth effort. Paralysis is destruction.

II. Because of the heart-rending spectacle of little children fainting in the streets and dying in their mothers' arms, while they vainly moan for food. "Because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets. They say to their mothers, 'Where is corn and wine?' when their soul was poured out into their mother's bosom" (vers. 11, 12). The harrowing details here given are the most affecting that have yet been depicted by the graphic and versatile pen of the prophet. The cry—an oft-repeated cry, as the tense means—of the children for food, which the mothers were powerless to supply, only added to the tortures they already suffered. So completely prostrate were they with their misery, that they saw their children die with indifference, and could not conceal an unnatural relief when they heard their last sob. Excessive grief blunts the edge of the finest natural instincts.

III. Because all the powers for expressing emotion are completely spent. "Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth" (ver. 11). Jeremiah employs the terms in ordinary use, and as they were popularly understood. As the heart was regarded by the Jews as the seat of the intellect, so the liver, as the chief of the large viscera classed together under the name of *bowels*, was supposed to be the seat of the emotions. By the pouring out, therefore, of the liver upon the ground was meant that his feelings had entirely given way under the acuteness of his sorrow, and he could no longer restrain them.—*Speaker's Comm.* The agony of grief was passed. It was quelled by sheer exhaustion. He wept till he could weep no more. He grieved till he was incapable of feeling his grief. A tearless sorrow is the most dangerous, and the most difficult to cure.

Lessons.—1. *There is a limit to the greatest human sorrow.* 2. *There is a moment in the experience of the sufferer when death itself is welcome.* 3. *The greatest sorrow is a painful testimony to the desolating power of sin.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Grief prostrating.** Late in the afternoon of a summer day I entered a quiet graveyard where slept one of my dearest friends. It occupied the brow of a hill, which, with many a knoll and graceful undulation, sloped to the green meadow, watered by a winding stream, now catching, at its repeated curves, the rays of the setting sun. On the left was a pleasant wood, where the sturdy pine and fruit-bearing beech concealed narrow paths to cool caves and mossy banks. White birches and the trembling aspen, with the sweet-scented willow, grew upon the right, and from beyond rose the curling smoke from the cottage-houses. A robin sang its song of love and praise, a sparrow passed me bearing food to its little progeny, and the chirp of the merry grasshopper mingled with the hum of hundreds of flitting insects. But for this peace-breathing scene I had no greeting. The wild storm, thunder, rain, and darkness had been more welcome. Yielding utterly to my grief, I threw myself upon the sod, and took no heed of time. There came over me a sense of utter and hopeless desolation; an agony like that of death turned to bitterness the blessings of my lot.

— Grief is a flower as delicate and prompt to fade as happiness. Still it does not wholly die. Like the magic rose, dried and unrecognisable, a warm air breathed on it will suffice to renew its bloom.—*De Gasparin.*

Misery makes indelible impressions. The rapidity with which ideas grow old in our memories is in a direct ratio to the squares of their importance. Their apparent age runs up miraculously, like the value of diamonds, as they increase in magnitude. A great calamity, for instance, is as old as the trilobites an hour after it has happened. It stains backward through all the leaves we have turned over in the book of life before its blot of tears or of blood is dry on the page we are turning. Did you ever happen to see that most soft-spoken and velvet-handed steam-engine at the Mint? The smooth piston slides backwards and forwards as a lady might slip her delicate finger in and out of a ring. The engine lays one of its fingers calmly but firmly upon a bit of metal; it is a coin now, and will remember that touch, and tell a new race about it, when the date upon it is crusted over with twenty centuries. So it is that a great silent-moving misery puts a new stamp on us in an hour or a moment—as sharp an impression as if it had taken half a lifetime to engrave it.—*Holmes.*

Distress exhausting. Distress is trouble of a mental kind, tending to despair. Tribulation may be described as the "fighting without," whilst distress may be described as the "fears within." That kind of trouble is indicated which comes upon a wrestler when his antagonist has succeeded in throwing him after a long struggle, has got his foot on him, is holding him down, and all seems to be up with him. Before, when wrestling, he was troubled, now he is distressed. Thus we see that the afflictions contemplated by the terms tribulation and distress are no light ones; and it is little wonder that, under the strain of such untoward circumstances of outward and inward trouble, the Christian should lose heart and fear the worst.

Grief excessively indulged. Ebenezer Adams, an eminent member of the Society of Friends, on visiting a lady of rank, whom he found, six months after the death of her husband, seated on a sofa covered with black cloth and in all the dignity of woe, approached her with great solemnity, and gently taking her by the hand, thus addressed her: "So, friend, I see, then, thou hast not yet forgiven God Almighty." This reproof had so great an effect on the lady, that she immediately laid aside her violent grief, and again entered on the discharge of the duties of life.

The cure of excessive sorrow. A pale mourner stood bending over the tomb, and his tears fell fast and often. As he raised his humid eyes to heaven, he cried, "My brother! O my brother." A sage passed that way and said, "For whom dost thou mourn?" "One," replied he, "whom I did not sufficiently love while living, but whose inestimable

worth I now feel." "What wouldst thou do if he were restored to thee?" The mourner replied that he would never offend him by an unkind word, but would take every occasion to show his friendship, if he could but come back to his fond embrace. "Then, waste not thy time in useless grief," said the sage; "but if thou hast friends, go and cherish the living, remembering that they will one day be dead also."

—Like the passengers through the tunnelled Alps from the dark, cold, stifling air, emerging on the broad light-flooded plains of Lombardy, it is often by a way which they know not, gloomy and underground, that the convoy is carried which God's Spirit is bringing to the wealthy place; and your present grief you will have no reason to regret if it introduce you to God's friendship and to joys which do not perish in the using. Affliction is God's message.—*Hamilton.*

HOMILETICS.

Inexpressible Ruin.

(Verse 13.)

I. Is incomparable with any ordinary calamity. "What thing shall I take to witness for thee? What thing shall I liken to thee? What shall I equal to thee?" Great as may be our distress, it is some comfort, slight though it be, to know there are others more or less unfortunate. But in this case, the prophet has no message from Jehovah to afflicted Judah, nor can he offer the ordinary human consolation of saying that others have had equal or worse sorrow to bear. The lamentable condition of Jerusalem was unparalleled; there had been nothing like it. No city had been so highly privileged with Divine honours: no city had been so signally punished. "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow" (chap. i. 12). Jeremiah had exhausted all his powers of description. Desperate indeed must be the state of Judah when such a master of similes had to confess his inability to coin an adequate comparison.

II. Is measureless as the illimitable ocean. "For thy breach is great like the sea." In his extremity to find some comparison, the prophet mentions the sea, which, on account of its vast dimensions, its illimitable depth and breadth, could alone furnish a fitting emblem of the magnitude of the devastation effected by the Chaldeans. The indefiniteness of the figure thus used reveals at once the straits to which the writer was reduced, and the utter ruin in which Judah was overwhelmed. Thou hast a flood of afflictions, a sea of troubles, an ocean of miseries.

III. Is beyond the power of human consolation and repair. "What shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? who can heal thee?" Human words fail; human help is powerless. There is no comfort in man, or in any number of men. If there is to be any relief or restoration, it must come from God. He alone can change ruin into prosperity, misery into joy, darkness into light. A traveller in Madeira set off one morning to climb the summit of a lofty mountain to gaze upon the distant scene and enjoy the balmy air. He had a guide, and they had with difficulty ascended some two thousand feet, when a thick mist was seen descending upon them, obscuring the heavens. The traveller thought there was no hope left but to retrace their steps or be lost. But as the cloud came nearer and darkness enveloped them, the guide stepped on before, penetrating the mist, calling out every now and then, "Press on, master, press on; there's light beyond!" They did press on, and in a few minutes, emerging from the thick mist, found themselves gazing upon a scene of transcendent beauty. Above, the sky was bright and cloudless; below, the almost level cloud through which they had passed was silvered with the rays of the sun,

like a field of untrodden snow. In the darkest experiences, if we will but listen, we may hear the voice of our Divine Guide exclaiming, "Press on, press on; there is light beyond!"

LESSONS.—1. *Great indeed is the calamity that baffles human ingenuity to describe.* 2. *The nation is utterly undone when smitten by the hand of God.* 3. *God alone can repair the damage His righteous anger has inflicted.*

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Drifting to ruin.** Two or three miles above the falls of Niagara an Indian canoe was one day observed floating quietly along, with its paddle on its side. At first it was supposed to be empty. No one could imagine a man would expose himself to such well-known danger; but a turn of the current revealed an Indian lying asleep at the bottom. The spectators were shocked, and shouted to rouse him, but in vain. It seemed more like death than sleep which held him. All hope of rescue was gone, and they hurried along the shore in alarm to see the end. It soon came, for the torrent was now rolling so rapidly that they could scarcely keep pace with the object of their interest. At length the roar of the water, which had been hitherto almost buried within the high banks below, by a sudden change of the wind broke upon them with double violence. This dreadful noise, with which the Indian ear was so familiar, did at last arouse him. He was seen to start up and snatch his paddle. But it was too late. The same dinning sound which had roused him from insensibility told him at the same time that it was in vain to seek safety now by paddling, nor indeed had he time to try. Upright as he stood he was swept over the awful precipice, and the boat and its occupant were seen no more.

Ruin and responsibility. Julian the Apostate had for his coat of arms on his escutcheon an eagle struck through the heart with a shaft feathered from her own wing, with the motto, "Our death flies to us with our own feathers, and our wings pierce us to the very heart." The moral is, that if a man receives injury, he alone has caused it, and is alone to blame.

Unutterable ruin. Every man feels, and not strangely, that there never were such experiences of life as his own. No joy was ever like our joy, no sorrow ever like our sorrow. Indeed, there is a kind of indignation excited in us when one likens our grief to his own. The soul is jealous of its experiences, and does not like pride to be humbled by the thought that they are common. For though we know that the world groans and travails in pain, and has done so for ages, yet a groan heard by our ear is a very different thing from a groan uttered by our mouth. The sorrows of other men seem to us like clouds of rain that empty themselves in the distance, and whose long-travelling thunder comes to us mellowed and subdued; but our own troubles are like a storm bursting right overhead and sending down its bolts upon us with direct plunge.—*Beecher.*

Ruin the punishment for sin. Fearful it is to consider that sin does not only drive us into calamity, but it makes us also impatient, and embitters our spirit in the sufferance: it cries aloud for vengeance, and so torments men before the time with such fearful outcries and horrid alarms, that their hell begins before the fire is kindled. It hinders our prayers, and consequently makes us hopeless and helpless. It perpetually affrights the conscience, unless by its frequent stripes it brings a callousness and an insensible damnation upon it. It makes us lose all that Christ purchased for us—all the blessings of His providence, the comforts of His Spirit, the aids of His grace, the light of His countenance, the hopes of His glory.—*Jeremy Taylor.*

— The pain, the disappointment, the dissatisfaction that wait on an evil course, show that the soul was not made to be the instrument of sin, but

its lofty avenger. The desolated affections, the haggard countenance, the pallid and sunken cheek, the sighings of grief, proclaim that these are ruins indeed; but they proclaim that something noble has fallen into ruin, proclaim it by signs mournful yet venerable, like the desolation of an ancient temple, like its broken walls and fallen columns, and the hollow sounds of decay that sink down heavily among its deserted recesses.—*Dewey.*

Helpless ruin appeals to our sympathy. Helplessness appealing to our pity begets affection. In one of the cottages of my country parish dwelt a poor idiot child, horrible to all eyes but her parents, and so helpless that, though older than sisters just blooming into womanhood, she lay, unable either to walk or speak, a burden on her mother's lap almost the whole day long—a heavy handful to one who had the cares of a family, and was the wife of a hard-working man, and a most painful contrast to the very roses that flung their bright clusters over the cottage window, as well as to the lark that, pleased with a grassy turf, carolled within its cage. Death, in most instances an unwelcome visitor, came at length—to her and to their relief. Relief! so I thought; and when the father came with an invitation to the funeral, so I said. Though not roughly, but inadvertently spoken, the word jarred on a tender chord; and I was more than ever taught how helplessness begets affection in the very measure and proportion of itself, when he burst into a fit of sorrow, and, speaking of his beautiful boys and blooming girls, said, "If it had been God's will, I would have parted with any of them rather than her."—*Guthrie.*

No hope but in God. The ninth capital in the Ducal Palace at Venice is decorated with figures of the eight virtues—Faith, Hope, Charity, Justice, Temperance, Prudence, Humility, and Fortitude. The virtues of the fourteenth century are somewhat hard-featured, with vivid and living expression, and plain everyday clothes of the time. Charity has her lap full of apples, and is giving one to a little child, who stretches his arm for it across a gap in the leafage of the capital. Fortitude tears open a lion's jaws; Faith lays her hand on her breast as she beholds the cross; and Hope is praying, while above is a hand seen emerging from sunbeams—the hand of God, and the inscription above is *Spes optima in Deo.* This design is rudely imitated by the fifteenth century workmen: the virtues have lost their hard features and living expression; they have now all got Roman noses, and have had their hair curled. Their actions and emblems are, however, preserved until we come to Hope—she is still praising, but she is praising to the sun only: the hand of God is gone!—*Ruskin.*

HOMILETICS.

False Prophets.

(Verse 14.)

I. Are self-deluded. "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee." *Thy* prophets—they were certainly not God's prophets. Their authority was self-assumed, and they ingratiated themselves into the favour of the people by prophesying only what was agreeable to their hearers. They indulged so lavishly in lies and deceit, that they almost persuaded themselves that what they uttered was truth. But they were deluded, and their delusion was self-induced. An inveterate habit of lying vitiates the moral sense; it becomes difficult to appreciate what is true. A lie poisons the atmosphere wherever it circulates. It has no legs and cannot stand, but it has wings and can fly far and wide.

II. Have no insight into the real cause of national calamities, and their teaching is powerless to prevent them. "They have not discovered thine

iniquity, to turn away thy captivity." The Syriac renders the words thus: *They have not disclosed to thee thy sins, that so thou mightest repent, and I might have turned away thy captivity.* They were so demoralised by the habitual practice of falsehood, that they were incompetent to judge the cause and drift of the national troubles. They could not see that disobedience to God was at the root of the general distress; or, if they did, they saw so little evil in it, or danger from it, that they did not deem it necessary to alarm the people by any words of warning. Had they been able to read the signs of the times and to act with promptness and fidelity in urging the people to repentance, Israel's chastisement might have been averted. When responsible leaders are unfaithful, and abuse their trust by deceiving others, the misguided nation rushes on to its doom.

III. **Invent messages full of deceit.** "But have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment." The word *burdens* does not mean here prophecies of a minatory character, for evidently the false prophets assured the people of prosperity and deliverance. The word is used in a contemptuous sense. The *burdens*, so different from the Divine message laid as a burden on the conscience of the genuine prophet, were, in this case, mere pretence, false, empty, and utterly inadequate to remove "the causes of banishment." The false prophets, in their attempt to account for the captivity, invented any cause but the real one—the apostasy of the people. Deceit produces darker shades of deceit. One lie must be quickly thatched with another, or it will soon rain through. The way of falsehood is tortuous. A deaf and dumb boy being asked, "What is truth?" replied by thrusting his finger forward in a straight line. When asked, "What is falsehood?" he made a zigzag motion with his finger. The result of false teaching is disintegration, banishment, *a driving out.* Every lie, great or small, is the brink of a precipice. the depth of which nothing but Omniscience can fathom. The poet Campbell calls it, "The torrent's smoothness, ere it dash below."

LESSONS.—1. *The true prophet receives his commission directly from God.* 2. *While the prophet is faithful to his Divine calling he is preserved from error.* 3. *The false prophet deceives himself as well as others.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**A false prophet.**

"The bigot theologian, in minute
Distinctions skilled, and doctrines unreduced
To practice; in debate how loud! how long!
How dexterous! in Christian love, how cold!
His vain conceits were orthodox alone.
The immutable and heavenly truth revealed
By God was nought to him; he had an art,
A kind of hellish charm, that made the lips
Of truth speak falsehood; to his liking turned
The meaning of the text; made trifles seem
The marrow of salvation;
Proved still his reasoning best, and his belief,
Though propped on fancies wild as madmen's dreams,
Most rational, most Scriptural, most sound;
With mortal heresy denouncing all
Who in his arguments could see no force.
He proved all creeds false but his own, and found
At last his own most false—most false, because
He spent his time to prove all others so."
—*Pollok.*

False doctrine. A man holding false and pernicious doctrines preached at a village chapel, and endeavoured to convince a large congregation that there is no punishment after death. At the close of the discourse he informed the people he would preach there again in four weeks, if they wished. A respectable merchant rose and said, "Sir, if your doctrine is true, we do not need you; and if it is false, we do not want you."

False teaching dangerous when mixed with truth. Falsehood is never so successful as when she baits her hook with truth. No opinions so fatally mislead us as those that are not wholly wrong, as no watches so effectually deceive the wearer as those that are sometimes right.—*Colton.*

— Error is never so dangerous as when it is the alloy of truth. Pure error would be rejected; but error mixed with truth makes use of the truth as a pioneer for it, and gets introduction

where otherwise it would have none. Poison is never so dangerous as when mixed up with food; error is never so likely to do mischief as when it comes to us under the pretensions and patronage of that which is true.—*Cumming.*

Faith in falsehood disastrous.—When the English army under Harold, and the Norman under William the Conqueror, were set in array for that fearful conflict which decided the fate of the two armies and the political destinies of Great Britain, William, perceiving that he could not by a fair attack move the solid columns of the English ranks, had recourse to a false movement in order to gain the victory. He gave orders that one flank of his army should feign to be flying from the field in disorder. The officers of the English army believed the falsehood, pursued them, and were cut off. A second time a false movement was made in another part of the field. The English again believed, pursued, and were cut off. By these movements the fortunes of the day were determined. Although the English had the evidence of their senses, yet they were led to believe a falsehood. They acted in view of it. The consequence was the destruction of a great part of their army, and the establishment of the Norman power in England. It is an incontrovertible fact that the whole heathen world, ancient and modern, have believed in and worshipped unholy beings as gods. In consequence of believing falsehood concerning the character of God, all heathendom at the present hour is filled with ignorance, impurity, and crime.—*J. B. Walker.*

Falsehood.

"I scorn this hated scene
Of masking and disguise,
Where men on men still gleam
With falseness in their eyes:
Where all is counterfeit,
And truth hath never say;
Where hearts themselves do cheat,
Concealing hope's decay."—*Motherwell.*

HOMILETICS.

The Heartless Triumph of the Scorner.

(Verses 15–17.)

I. Expressed in aggravated taunts (ver. 15). The conquerors heap insult upon insult on the fallen city. They employ all the familiar signs expressive of contempt and derision. They clap their hands, they hiss, they wag their heads, and with a scornful curl of the lip they ask, "Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?" Jerusalem had acquired a world-wide renown. It was the pride of the Jew, the dread of its subject tribes, the envy of surrounding nations. No city had been so signally honoured of Heaven; and now that it was prone in the dust, its foes united in a wild chorus of fiendish jubilation. How vividly does this verse remind us of the scene around the cross of the world's Redeemer! (Matt. xxvii. 39–44; Mark xv. 29–32; Luke xxiii. 35–37). It is heartless and wicked to make sport of the miseries of others, and is a cruel aggravation of those miseries. The triumph of the wicked is short. Their hollow-ringing laughter is as "the crackling of thorns under a pot." Their taunts and gibes fall back upon themselves. Our unkind words come home to roost.

II. **Savagely exults in the havoc that has been ardently desired** (ver. 16). The intensity of the enemy's exultation is shown by the heaping up of unconnected words, with each of which its own proper object must be supplied. We have found what we sought, have seen what we looked for; our hopes and longings are all fulfilled.—*Speaker's Commentary.* The enemies of Zion eagerly watched for her downfall, they earnestly desired it, they maliciously helped to bring it about; and now it had come, their maddened hilarity and scorn knew no bounds. The truly brave never exult over the defeat of their worst foes. They have often been

known to weep over the devastation they have themselves created. It is inhuman to chuckle over the sufferings of others. It is a depth of demoralisation reached only by the cowardly and craven-hearted.

III. **The fulfilment of Divine threatenings against national unfaithfulness** (ver. 17). The ruin of Jerusalem, over which her adversaries so savagely rejoiced, was no accidental or unforeseen event. It was the fulfilment of the Divine purpose, of which Israel had been so often forewarned from the days of old. It was distinctly foretold that if Israel forsook Jehovah and lapsed into idolatry, they would be punished with all the miseries of a siege, ending in national overthrow (Lev. xxvi. 14–39; Deut. xxviii. 15–68). The contemptuous scorn of their enemies emphasised their punishment, and testified to the exactness with which the Divine threatenings against disobedience had been fulfilled. The Divine word, whether in threat or promise, never fails. God is unchangeably faithful both in mercy and in judgment.

LESSONS.—1. *The wicked ever gloat over the downfall of the good.* 2. *The gibes of the scorner are a bitter ingredient in the punishment of the unfaithful.* 3. *The taunts of the wicked have no power to injure the truly righteous.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 15, 16. **The world's treatment of its suffering Redeemer:** 1. A wild tempest of unreasoning scorn, hatred, and exultation. 2. A mournful evidence of the intense acrimony of sin. 3. Does not prevent the unselfish working out of its sublime redemption.

Ver. 17. **The Divine threatenings of judgment:** I. *Unaffected by the lapse of time.* "He hath fulfilled His word that He had commanded in the days of old." II. *Are carried out with relentless certainty.* "He hath thrown down and hath not pitied." III. *Always finds agents willing to execute them.* "He hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee; He hath set up the horn of thine adversaries."

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Triumph premature.** During the reign of Henry VIII., the Pope, angry at the English monarch's resistance, called a council in Rome, at which it was resolved that the Emperor of Germany should invade England, and that Henry should be deposed. So rejoiced was the Papal party, that they illuminated Rome; cannons were fired, bonfires lighted, and great bodies of men paraded the streets shouting, "The Empire and Spain." Already, in their eager expectation, England was a second Netherlands, a captured province under the regency of Catherine or Mary. How bitterly these expectations were overthrown history too well declares.

Scorn, not to be dreaded.

"Ridicule is a weak weapon when levelled at
a strong mind;
But common men are cowards, and dread
an empty laugh.
Betray mean terror of ridicule, thou shalt
find fools enough to mock thee;
But answer thou their laughter with contempt,
And the scoffers will lick thy feet."
—*Tupper.*

A scoffer non-plussed. On a certain occasion, in the presence of a vast and brilliant assemblage, a person more noted for his self-esteem than for his learning was speaking against the Christian religion in terms of the severest scorn and derision. The celebrated Dr. Belknap, overhearing the orator, stepped up to him and asked, "Well, sir, have you found a religion that is better?" The scoffer, considerably abashed by this unlooked-for question, was forced to acknowledge that thus far he had not. "Well," responded the Doctor, "when you have, let me know, and I will join you in adopting it." The rebuke was as wise as it was just.

Sarcasm destroys friendship. Life is full of paradoxes. There are some slight causes which will destroy the strongest friendship. Great causes will

not always impair it. A sarcastic and disparaging speech made by a friend concerning his friend in his absence, and repeated by some mischief-maker, will invariably disturb friendship; while an angry altercation, or some injury to person or to property, will often leave friendship unharmed. When alienation begins, it increases at a very rapid rate. The rust spot multiplies apace. The mildew spreads quickly. The rift in the lute becomes longer and longer. —*S. Martin.*

The Redeemer's sufferings unique. Did Christ then merely suffer as any other man has done? Suffering is a question of nature. The educated man suffers more than the uneducated man; the poet probably suffers more than the mathematician; the commanding officer suffers more in a defeat than the common soldier. The more life the more suffering, the billows of sorrow being in proportion to the volume of our manhood. Now Jesus Christ was not merely a man. He was man, and by the very compass of His manhood He suffered more than any mortal can endure. The storm may pass as fiercely over the shallow lake as over the Atlantic, but by its very volume the latter is more terribly shaken. No other man had come with Christ's ideas; in no other man was the element of self so entirely abnegated; no other man had offered such opposition to diabolical rule. All these circumstances combine to render Christ's sufferings unique, yet not one of them puts Christ so far away as to prevent us finding in His suffering unfailing solace and strength. — *Dr. Parker.*

Divine punishment certain. Those who made light of the invitation to the supper mentioned in the Gospel were shut out. The sceptical Pilate ended a miserable, hopeless life by suicide. The rich man went on living splendidly, giving banquets, pampering his body, until one day he died and was buried, and awoke in torment to know its reality at last. The people in Noah's days lived securely and indifferent, "until the flood came and took them all away." On the inhabitants of Sodom the sun was shining when Lot went out of the city; but the same day it rained fire and brimstone, and destroyed them all.

HOMILETICS.

A Call to Prayer.

(Verses 18, 19.)

I. **Addressed to a city suffering the miseries of a desolating siege.** "Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion!" (ver. 18). It sounds strange thus to appeal to the *wall* of Zion—to pray so passionately that tears may run down like a river. But this is quite after the manner of Jeremiah and other sacred writers (comp. ver. 8; Isa. xiv. 31; Jer. xxii. 29; Hab. ii. 11; Luke xix. 40). Carried away with an outburst of sorrow, "the prophet suddenly addresses the wall, which had so long been their shelter and defence, and bids it, as the representative of the people who had dwelt secure under its protection, to shed floods of tears on their behalf. Broken up by the enemy, it could be their guardian no longer, but by its ruins it might still cry unto the Lord in their behalf." However great may be our distress, it is always wise to promptly obey the summons to pray. Prayer brings moral strength and brightens the hope of rescue.

II. **To be mingled with much weeping.** "Let tears run down like a river day and night; give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease" (ver. 18). Like a river, a brook, or torrent, rushing along furiously at one time and afterwards dried up. In the nature of things weeping cannot be incessant. Like a torrent, it gushes out in floods of tears, and, though ceasing at intervals, it is in this instance to be often repeated. Reasons for frequent weeping will be found

in the prolonged continuance of the misery. Suffering is apt to stupify and harden, if the heart is not softened with tears. Prayer is the more genuine when accompanied with godly sorrow.

III. **To be expressed with loud cries throughout the night-watches.** "Arise, cry out in the night; in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord" (ver. 19). At the beginning of each night-watch means all the night through. There are crises in life, times of trouble and peril, when the time usually devoted to sleep may be fitly employed in earnest, agonising prayer. Such a time had come in the history of Judah; such a time comes to most. There is a pathetic tenderness of sorrow in the night-moanings and cries of the soul, and it is then we are often conscious of the special nearness of Divine help.

"Hours spent with pain and Thee
Lost hours have never seemed;
No! those are lost which but might be
From earth for heaven redeemed.

For weeping, wakeful eyes
Instinctive look above,
And catch, through openings in the skies,
Thy beams, unslumbering Love!"

IV. **To be offered especially on behalf of perishing children.** "Lift up thy hands towards Him for the life of thy young children that faint for hunger at the top of every street" (ver. 19). Among the most heart-rending miseries of the siege was the spectacle of little children prostrate in the streets slowly dying of starvation. You cannot enter a street in any part of the city but this sad sight meets the eye. The lifting up of the hands is not only the attitude and symbol of prayer, but indicates earnestness in supplication. The sufferings of helpless children appeal to the hardest heart, and when it is impossible to render any other help, we are called upon to pray for them. When our children are in extremity, so are we. Prayer is the only refuge, apart from which there is nothing but wretchedness and despair.

LESSONS.—1. *Our daily necessities are a constant call to prayer.* 2. *Misery finds relief in prayer.* 3. *The young should ever be the subject of earnest prayer.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 19. A night of prayer: 1. Necessary in circumstances of special peril. 2. Often characterised by intense earnestness. 3. Familiar to many an anxious mother pleading for the salvation of her child.

— **Watch-Night service.** I. *It is never too soon to pray.* There is no reason why you should delay to the morning light. "In the beginning of the night-watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord." How many young persons imagine that religion is a thing for age, or at least for maturity! They do not want their young shoulders galled with an early burden; they do not think it is true that "it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth;" and they forget that that "yoke is easy" and that "burden is light." God hears children. He called Samuel when he was but a child. We have had our Josiahs, we have had our Timothys; we have seen those in early youth brought to the Saviour. Young man, it is not too soon. II. *It is not too late to cry to the Lord.* If the sun be set and the watches of the night have commenced their round, the mercy-seat is open. No shop is open so late as the House of Mercy. The devil has two tricks with men. Sometimes he puts their clock a little backward, and says, "Stop! there is time enough yet;" and when that does not answer, he turns the hands on,

and cries out, "Too late! too late!" Within another fifteen minutes another year shall have come; but if the Spirit of God calls you this year, He will not call you too late in the year. If to the last second you should live, if God the Holy Ghost calls you then, He will not have called you too late. The darkness of night is gathering; it is coming on, and you are near death. Arise, sleeper, arise! Thou art now taking the last nap of death. III. *We cannot pray too vehemently.* "*Cry out* in the night." God loves earnest prayers. He loves impetuous prayers, vehement prayers. Let a man preach, if he dare, coldly and slowly, but never let him pray so. Those who cry with weak voices, who do not cry aloud, must not expect to get a blessing. When you go to Mercy's gate, do not give a gentle tap like a lady, do not give a single knock like a beggar, but take the knocker and rap hard till the very door seems to shake. Rap with all your might, and recollect that God loveth those who knock hard at Mercy's gate. IV. *We cannot pray too simply.* "Pour out your hearts before Him." Not pour out your fine words, not pour out your beautiful periods, but pour out *your hearts.* "I dare not," says one; "there is black stuff in my heart." Out with it, then; it is better out than in. "I cannot pray as I could wish," says another; "my crying out is a feeble one." When you pour out water, it does not make much noise. So you can "pour out your heart like water," and it will run away, and you can scarcely know it. There is many a prayer uttered in a garret, down in a cellar, or in some lonely place where the cobbler sits mending his shoes beneath a window, which the world does not hear, but the Lord hears it. Pour out your heart like water by confessing your sins, by begging the Lord to have mercy on you for Christ's sake. And when it is all poured out, He will come and fill it again. Listen for one moment to the ticking of that clock. It is the beating of the pulse of eternity; it is the footstep of death pursuing you. Time is precious, and when we have little of it, it is more precious. You will soon enter another year. This year will have gone in a few seconds. Where will the next year be spent?—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**A mute summons to prayer.** Venice may well call upon us to note with reverence, that of all the towers which are still seen rising like a branchless forest from her islands, there is but one whose office was other than that of summoning to prayer, and that one was a watch-tower only.—*Ruskin.*

Tearful intercession irresistible. Miss Gratz—supposed to have been the original of Rebecca in "Ivanhoe"—was nursing her grandfather in his last illness. Calling her to him one day, he said, "What can I do for you, my dear child?" Turning upon him her beautiful eyes filled with tears, she said in a tone of earnest entreaty, "Grandfather, forgive Aunt Shinah." This was a daughter who had been long estranged because of her marriage with a Gentile. The old man sought his grand-daughter's hand, pressed it, and, after a silence, said in a broken voice, "Send for her." In due course the lady came, received her father's forgiveness and blessing, and when, a few days later, he breathed his last, the arms of his long-estranged child were about him, while Rebecca Gratz sat silently at his side.

Prayer necessary for service. Bees suffer sadly from famine during the dry years which occasionally occur in the southern and middle portions of California. If the rainfall amounts only to three or four inches, instead of from twelve to twenty, as in ordinary seasons, then sheep and cattle die in thousands, and so do these small winged cattle, unless they are carefully fed or removed to other pastures. No flowers, no honey; no rain, no food. They who teach others must themselves feed on the truths they declare. Failure to commune with God will give the poverty-stroke to our endeavours to bless man.

Sorrow drives men to prayer.

"'There is no God,' the foolish saith,
But none 'There is no sorrow;'
And Nature oft the cry of faith
In bitter need will borrow:
Eyes which the preacher could not school,
By wayside graves are raised,
And lips say 'God be pitiful,'
Who ne'er said 'God be praised!'
Be pitiful, O God!"
—*Mrs. Browning.*

"Jesus, pitying Saviour, hear me;
Draw Thou near me;
Turn Thee, Lord, in grace to me;
For Thou knowest all my sorrow;
Night and morrow
Doth my cry go up to Thee.

Peace I cannot find: O take me,
Lord, and make me
From the yoke of evil free;
Calm this longing never-sleeping,
Still my weeping,
Grant me hope once more in Thee."
—*Tersteegen.*

Sympathy with youth. George Moore, merchant and philanthropist, was the constant resort of young men wanting situations. If he could not provide for them in his own warehouse, he endeavoured to find situations for them amongst his friends. He took no end of trouble about this business. After his young friends had obtained employment, he continued to look after them. He took down their names and addresses in a special red book kept for the purpose, and repeatedly asked them to dine with him on Sunday afternoons. He usually requested that they should go to some church or chapel in the evening.

A mother's prayer. After Augustine had lost faith in Manichæism, he found himself in the same situation as he was ten years before. There was the same longing after truth, but linked now with a feeling of desolation, a bitter sense of deception, and a large measure of scepticism. He was no longer at ease in Carthage, and resolved on a journey to Rome, where he ventured to hope for a more brilliant and profitable career as a rhetorician. His mother wished either to prevent his going, or to go with him. While she spent a night in the Church of the Martyr, praying and wrestling with God in tears to prevent the voyage, Augustine sailed for the coast of Italy, and his deceived mother found herself the next morning alone on the sea-shore. She had learned, however, the heavenly art of forgiving, and believing also where she could not see. In quiet resignation she returned to the city, and continued to pray for the salvation of her son. Though meaning well, she this time erred in her prayer, for the journey of Augustine was the means of his salvation. The denial of the prayer was, in fact, the answering of it. Instead of the husk, God granted rather the substance of her petition in the conversion of her son. "Therefore," says he, "hadst Thou, O God, regard to the aim and essence of her desires, and didst not do what she then prayed for, that Thou mightest do for me what she continually implored."—*Schaff.*

HOMILETICS.

A Prayer for Divine Compassion.

(Verses 20–22.)

I. Reminding Jehovah of His former favour to the sufferers. "Behold, O Lord, and consider to whom Thou hast done this" (ver. 20). The prophet seems to feel that if God would only look and recall to mind who they were who were suffering, He would surely have pity. They are not the heathen, but His own people, the seed of Abraham, whom He raised from obscurity and endowed with unexampled blessings. Their present misery was all the more painful to endure when contrasted with their former affluence and power, and would surely move the compassion of Him who had so often interposed on their behalf. It is a great help in prayer to remind God of His former loving-kindness. Every blessing we receive from God increases His interest in our welfare. Every act of disobedience is a sin against Infinite Love.

II. **Uttered from the midst of appalling distress** (vers. 20, 21). In these verses we have a vivid description of the suffering and desolation occasioned by the siege. In the extreme exigencies of famine the most horrible cannibalism was practised: the pangs of hunger devoured maternal affection, and mothers devoured their newly-born infants. Even this had been predicted as the fruit of disobedience (Deut. xxviii. 53). How little do we appreciate the great goodness of God in providing daily food for ourselves and our children! Everywhere in the city were visible the most ghastly scenes of indiscriminate massacre—"priest and prophet, young and old, virgins and young men," lay in promiscuous heaps of the slain. If prayer can reach heaven, it must surely be when ascending from the midst of anguish like this. The greater the distress we are in, the more urgent and importunate should be our prayers.

III. **Wrung from a people terrified with startling proofs of the Divine anger.** "Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the Lord's anger none escaped or remained" (ver. 22). Jeremiah had often threatened the terrors of God's wrath in the destruction of the nation, if the people persisted in idolatry; but they heeded not. They made jests of his warnings, and their earnest repetition only increased their ridicule. But when they saw Jerusalem hemmed round by the victorious Chaldeans, and the utter ruin that followed, they then saw the portentous meaning of "the terrors" that had been so often threatened and so recklessly despised. The anger of the Lord became to them a solemn reality, and, overwhelmed with confusion and fear, they cry for help. Whatever impels the soul to pray is a blessing. The beginning of prayer may rise from our fears; but as we persevere, it will be actuated by nobler motives. All that prayer can do is to bring our case before God. We must then leave it there with Him, and say, "Thy will be done."

LESSONS.—1. *The final appeal of the helpless is to God.* 2. *When distress induces prayer, deliverance is at hand.* 3. *Jehovah is graciously moved to help by human entreaty.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 20. "Behold, O Lord, and consider to whom Thou hast done this." **The Divine pity**: 1. Earnestly implored by a suffering people. 2. Invoked on the ground of former kindnesses, which, it is acknowledged, have been abused. 3. Is never appealed to in vain.

Ver. 22. **The tyranny of fear**: 1. Realised when beset by a powerful enemy. 2. When the enemy is summoned and directed by One whom we have consciously offended. 3. When we are witnesses of cruelties we are powerless to prevent.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Prayer.** It is helplessness casting itself on power. It is infirmity leaning on strength, and misery wooing bliss. It is the flight of the soul to the bosom of God, and the spirit soaring upward and claiming nativity beyond the stars. It is the soaring eagle mounting upward in its flight, and with steady gaze pursuing the track till lost to all below. It is the roving wanderer looking towards his abiding-place, where are all his treasures and his gold. It is the prisoner pleading for release. It is the mariner of a dangerous sea, upon the reeling topmast, descrying the broad and quiet haven of repose. It is the soul, oppressed by earthly soarings, escaping to a broader and purer sphere, and bathing its plumes in the ethereal and eternal.—*Wells.*

Yearning for God.—When my blood flows like wine, when all is ease and prosperity, when the sky is blue and birds sing and flowers blossom, and my life is an anthem moving in time and tune, then this world's joy and affection suffice. But when a change comes, when I am weary and disappointed, when the skies lower into a

sombre night, when there is no song of bird, and the perfume of flowers is but their dying breath, when all is sunsetting and autumn, then I yearn for Him who sits with the summer of love in His soul, and feel that all earthly affection is but a glow-worm light compared to that which blazes with such effulgence in the heart of God.—*Beecher.*

Divine compassion. We often suffer more on account of other's troubles than they themselves do in those troubles, for both love and sorrow take their measure as much from the capacity of the nature that experiences them as from the power of the externally exciting cause. How much one suffers with or for another does not depend altogether upon how much that other is suffering, but upon how much that nature which sympathises has with which to suffer. God feels with us, so that our experiences throw their waves upon the shore of His soul. He carries us so near to His heart that all our feelings which are of any moment produce their effects in some degree in His bosom. It seems very strange that the Maker of all the earth should permit Himself to be a participant in all the petty experiences that belong to any human life. No man would have dared to conceive such an idea of God, and to have believed any such thing as that, if it had not been revealed in unequivocal terms.

The compassion of Jesus. Luther said, "I would run into the arms of Christ if He stood with a drawn sword in His hands." John Butterworth, reading this, resolved to do likewise, and found, as every venturing sinner does, no sword in the hands of Jesus, but open arms and a hearty welcome. Christ's proclamation, for ever sounding forth to every burdened heart, is "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He demonstrated His marvellous compassion by dying for us. He will not now repulse the approach or disregard the cry of the needy.

The influence of fear. There is a virtuous fear, which is the effect of faith; and there is a vicious fear, which is the product of doubt. The former leads to hope, as relying on God, in whom we believe; the latter inclines to despair, as not relying on God, in whom we do not believe. Persons of the one character fear to lose God; persons of the other character fear to find Him.—*Pascal.*

Slavish and filial fear. There are two kinds of fear—one full of suspicious watchfulness, of anxious apprehension, of trepidation, terror, and dismay; the other such as can dwell in the same heart with confidence and love, and is but another form of reverence. Filial fear of God is a duty; slavish and servile dread of Him is a sin. Filial fear shrinks from sin; servile fear only from the smart of punishment. Filial fear keeps men from departing from the living God, servile fear drives them from Him. By filial fear men are made like the man Christ Jesus; by servile fear they may be scared from iniquity, as the wolf from the sheepfold by the shepherd's gun; but it does no more to make them holy than the fright does to destroy the wolf's ferocity. Filial fear animates us to avoid whatever would be offensive to our Heavenly Father, and, if the expression may be allowed, to consult His feelings and desires; but servile fear, as it springs from selfishness, causes us only to care for ourselves, and at best makes us not better, but only a little more prudent than the devil.—*Bertram.*

The greatest fear. When a city is compassed round about with a wall that is impregnable, it will be opened still towards heaven, and therefore cannot be out of danger if God be an enemy. For all their walls and bars, God could rain fire and brimstone upon the Sodomites out of heaven. Alexander asked the Scythians what they were most afraid of, thinking they would say of himself, who was so victorious everywhere. But they answered scoffingly they were most afraid lest heaven should fall upon them. We, indeed, need not fear anything but this only, lest the heaven should fall upon us, lest God should be our enemy.—*J. Stoughton.*

CHAPTER III.

An Ideal Representation of National Sorrow.

The middle elegy is, not only in structure but also in tone, readily distinguished from the other four. An element of personality is manifest in it which is not in them. The poet concentrates in himself all forms of the calamities which he laments. Some of these seem too sharp and heavy to be experienced by a single individual, and the doubt is turned into a certainty when he associates himself once and again with others. He is a member of a body. In this feature a significant proof is indicated of that unfolding form of prophecy in which the whole community of Israel, or an undefined part of it, is regarded as represented by a special person—the Servant whose experiences are hardly so much his own as those of his people. He stands apart from them by the peculiarities of his condition, but he draws to himself all their sorrows and pains, and that burden impels him to act as an advocate on their behalf before Jehovah. As we read such things we are reminded of the resemblance which they bear to the course of the prophet Jeremiah. He was "separated" from his nation, but became a participant of the terrible doom he announced. He would not stand off from his people when he might have gone with the Babylonian Captain of the Guard. It was his *pure conscience* and sensitive heart which realised *the fierce anger of the Lord* against the sins which had corrupted the conscience and heart of his fellow-countrymen. It was for their sakes, he said, *My heart is faint within me. . . . For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black.* His position was a forecast of that mightier Servant who *came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*

The progress of the poem presents a strange tumult of thought. There is arraignment of God's dealings and acknowledgment of His mercies; impatience at his sufferings, which does not crowd out his patience; wonder why the Lord should send such punishments, and confession of sins with little hope that it would pave the way for pardon. Yet is not this a true portrait of each soul that is *striving against sin* in himself and others? *Without fighting, within fears.*

The first part of the chapter sets forth the soul-sufferings of the godly in their cheerless and hopeless misery (vers. 1–18); then it ascends to hope by meditation on the compassion of God (vers. 19–39); next is the recognition of God's justice in the punishment, but the intensity of which, through the malice of enemies, the Lord cannot pass by (vers. 40–54); and last, prayer that He would send help and take vengeance on the enemy (vers. 55–66).

(א) Ver. 1. The author writes as if his own person was the object on which all the troubles had been inflicted. **I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.** The repression of the name of the wielder of the rod is remarkable in view of its reiteration in Chapter II. That here it was of set purpose seems proved by the persistent omission till ver. 18, and is probably to be accounted for by the poet's wish to indicate a sort of climax to a soul-struggle in which he could not take the name of Jehovah till all appeared lost. The rod signifies the means by which the affliction was produced, and is illustrated by the phrase, *The Assyrian is the rod of mine anger* (Isa. x. 5).

Ver. 2. The unnamed had accumulated affliction. **He has led and caused me to walk in darkness and not in light,** in perplexity as well as misery.

Ver. 3. And it was continuously carried on. **Surely against me he turns his hand again and again all the day.**

(ב) Ver. 4. Details as to how the writer suffered. **My flesh and my skin he has worn out, he has broken my bones.** Bodily exhaustion and racking pains consume the vital forces.

Ver. 5. Obstruction is placed so that I may not find a change. **He has builded against me,** shut me in as if He was besieging me behind and before with hurting and wearying obstacles, **gall and travail.**

Ver. 6. Darkness was added. **He has made me to dwell in dark places,** dismal and without hope, as those in which lay **the for ever dead,** those who had gone into Sheol, and for whom there is no way of return.

(ג) Ver. 7. Freedom is taken away by close confinement and a **heavy chain.**

Ver. 8. Prisoner though I am, I can make entreaties for relief. **I cry and call for help,** but no response is given; **he shutteth out my prayer;** he had used means to prevent the petitions reaching him, as if the barriers were not fabricated by the sins of the petitioner!

Ver. 9. As a traveller, I am brought to a standstill. **He has fenced up my ways with hewn stone,** and there is a necessity to turn aside to **crooked paths,** which lead to and fro without purpose.

(ד) Ver. 10. Difficulties had been embarrassing, but dangers were also added. **In the crooked paths the bear and the lion** lurked, and **he is** there, like them, **lying in wait** for me.

Ver. 11. I wandered aimlessly. He has led me **astray** and then **he has torn me in pieces, has made me desolate,** left me mangled and alone.

Ver. 12. Not only such rending as that by beasts **of prey has distressed me, but also mal-**

treatment by men. I have been treated as the quarry of a hunter. **He set me as a mark for the arrow.**

(ה) Ver. 13. There is no miss when God aims at a mark. **He has made the sons of his quiver to enter into my reins**; the central points of vital action were sore wounded.

Ver. 14. The figure is hardly changed. Perhaps **a laughing-stock to all my people, their song all the day**, may be regarded as the shaft which went to the quick. Jeremiah calls a deceiving tongue *a deadly arrow* (ix. 8). They who should have stood by him, as partaking of the same afflictions, hurled at him bolts of ridicule in jaunty songs. Another reading ascribes the mocking to *all peoples*, not to his fellow-countrymen.

Ver. 15. The nutriment and comfort which I needed were replaced by adversities which I endured to the utmost extent bearable. **He has filled me with bitternesses**—different kinds of sufferings—**and sated me with wormwood.**

(ו) Ver. 16. In respect to means of nourishment, I have been still further exasperated. **Also he has broken my teeth with gravel**; either that which was chewed was full of gritty sand, or *for bread he had stones given* him. *A strange work* for the Father! **He has covered me with ashes**, I am *one who mourneth in bitterness.*

Ver. 17. Notwithstanding all my afflictions, I might have been calm and hopeful, but the culminating point of all I have to sustain is the conviction that I am put far from God. Is it not a piteous condition which may extort complaint of Thyself? **Thou hast cast off my soul from peace.** So dense is this *outer darkness*, that any recollection of ever being in comfort has faded away, **I forget good.**

Ver. 18. This reads like an account of the climax to the trials undergone. **I said, as if talking to myself, My strength is perished, and my expectation from Jehovah.** The future is void of good. I am unable to look for anything from Him. *In Jah Jehovah is everlasting strength*, but I do not perceive it. I have lost the direction towards Him.

This recalling of *the name* at last seems to turn the current of thought. I must not let go trust in Him. I must tell Him the desires of my heart.

The *sorrow according to God* is a product of His wisdom and love. "Sorrow is God's last message to man; it is God speaking in emphasis. He who abuses it shows that he can shut his ears when God speaks loudest. Therefore heartlessness or impenitence after sorrow is more dangerous than intemperance in joy; its results are always more tragic. . . . God's wrath is an ennobling, not a stupefying doctrine" (*Smith*). Nor is it discouraging to leal-hearted men, though menacing.

(ז) Vers. 19–21. **The name of Jehovah is as a rallying-call to reject the rash expression of despair just heard, and stirs up thought of what God's character is.** The author begins to feel that he can have recourse to a prayer to be remembered, and so these verses mark the passage from hopeless bafflings with *no small storm* to the hopeful sound of a favouring breeze.

Ver. 19. **Remember my affliction and my homelessness, the wormwood and the gall**; a reminiscence of salient points in the sufferings he had passed through, and which might evoke the compassion and power of the All-merciful.

Ver. 20. The correct translation of this verse is uncertain, and preference is given to this. **Remembering, thou wilt remember** all those things; **also [that] my soul is cast down in me.** I am *heavy laden.* I have no might. Either I shall be overwhelmed and *sink into deep mire where there is no standing*, or else *out of weakness be made strong* by Thee. It would be like Thee to *make haste to help me.*

Ver. 21. **This I will bring back to my heart, this thought, that Thou wilt** *not be always wroth, for the spirit would fail before Thee and the souls which thou hast made*, has taken full possession of my inner man; **therefore I will hope.** There must be a blessing in store, for God pities and God rules in exhaustless grace. Out of the darkest depression He can lift to a light in which I may walk and never *be ashamed of my hope.*

(ח) Ver. 22. The hopefulness which had begun to lift a desponding soul points to the ground on which it may become secure. Its hazy outlook is seeming to clear, and, as in all true ideas of human relationship to God, that which is felt as a privilege for the individual is regarded to be a privilege for all souls also who seek the Lord. One voices the confession of *the remnant of Israel* thus: **Jehovah's mercies**, not in one form, but in many forms they affect men, and, whether shown to individuals or communities, they counteract the wasting tendencies of evil. A striking proof of His varied graciousness is manifest in that **we are not consumed.** More will follow. His continuous action is a token that His nature and name is the All-gracious; **for his compassions fail not.**

Ver. 23. Every day sees some renewal of them; there is "daily help for daily needs," **as great is thy faithfulness.** God is faithful to all that He has promised in creation and grace.

Ver. 24. This perception that the Lord is gracious, pitying, and trustworthy, leads on, not merely to verbal profession of the knowledge of God, but to an acceptance of Himself as the dear and only treasure of the heart. **My portion is Jehovah.** None in heaven for Him; none on earth desired with Him.

(ט) Ver. 25. Such an acceptance suggests more knowledge. **Good is Jehovah to them that wait for him, to a soul that seeks him.** He is ready to respond to those who feel need of Him and foster longings after Himself.

Ver. 26. So when the graciousness of the Lord is perceived, and its proffers yielded to, blessedness is not far off. **Good it is both to wait and be silent for the salvation of Jehovah. There** is to be no striving, nor crying, nor causing the voice to be heard in the street. Confidence in His power to save hushes fears and doubts, and enables us calmly to meet the events of life. *He will in no wise leave or forsake* those who wait for Him.

Ver. 27. **Good is it for a man to bear a yoke**, that is, anything by which he will be trained for his Owner, and to do his Owner's work. Teaching may do so; affliction may do so. Both the one and the other show to a man what he is—ignorant, weak, with more that is bad than he had believed he had. God speaks in both methods as issues of His love, and to obtain *vessels unto honour, sanctified, meet for the Master's use.* The phrase **in his youth** does not mean that the poet was still a young man. He might be an aged man, looking back on the experiences of his life, and conscious of the value of the discipline he had been subjected to when the dew of youth was upon him. He is blessed who, in earlier years, has been drawn or driven to look into the face of realities, and to learn something of the *afflictions of Christ* before he has been in grip with temptations from the clamant *lusts of the flesh and of the mind.*

(ס) Ver. 28. A yoke is not of itself beneficial; it must be borne along with desires and efforts to reach to its purpose. "Since it is good for man that he should learn to endure suffering, let him sit still and bear it patiently; . . . let him sit solitary, as becomes those in sorrow, and be silent without murmuring when God puts such a burden on him."—*Keil.* The fogs of the world, if a man enters into them, may veil the waymarks of God.

Ver. 29. **Let him put his mouth in the dust**—significant of being humbled *under the mighty hand of God*—indulging in no whimpers, framing no self-excuses, making no boasts, only waiting to *hear what God the Lord will speak*, and by no means despairing of help for every time of need. **It may be there is hope.**

Ver. 30. **Let him give his cheek to him that smiteth him**, as was similarly enforced in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v. 39), and involving the wider application, *when reviled not to revile again.* Exemplified by Job, by the prophetic Servant of Jehovah, by the greatest of all Sufferers. The gradation is perceptible. "The sitting alone and in silence is comparatively the easiest. It is harder to place the mouth in the dust and yet cling to hope; it is most difficult of all to give the cheek to the smiter, and to satiate oneself with dishonour" (*Naegel.*), **be filled full with reproaches.**

(ב) Ver. 31. For this silent waiting on the Lord, amid humiliations and scorn, there is all-sufficient strength. It is in the Lord Himself, in the belief that He is at work; that, whatever our tribulations are, however bitter ingredients we must drain out of our cup, whatever the moral conflicts and self-condemnations we must pass through, He will not put us away. **The Lord will not cast off for ever**; there will be an end of tears and isolation on account of the absent Friend.

Ver. 32. His providences may distress us. Physical pains, social straits, national demoralisation, and inward unrest, blame, forebodings, may overwhelm us. These are goads by which He is thrusting us from a wrong way into a right, but "it is love that bruises us." **Yet he will have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.**

Ver. 33. He would rather not produce suffering. His heart is not in doing so. He has a distinct end in view to be reached through tribulation. **For he afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men.** Child and adult, Israelite and heathen, will meet trouble, but not one is outside the sympathy of God. We can supplement this from a later teacher, who tells us that our Father *chastises for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.*

(ט) Vers. 34-36. The Lord does not afflict willingly, yet He is not indifferent to the injustice of man to man. All the details of human procedure are regarded by Him, and he would have men to know that He is *on the throne judging right*, that they may trust Him entirely, and that there is no evil needing to be grieved over but sin. Such is the intimation in this triad of verses, the three parts of which depend on the last clause: **To trample under his feet**—the feet of the oppressor—**all prisoners of the earth**; an allusion to the cruelties of the Chaldeans. Jews in exile, Jews in prisons, yes, and outraged captives everywhere, are referred to. *He hears the sighing of the prisoner.* **To turn aside the right of a man**, that which is grounded in the far-reaching nature of things formed by the Righteous One, **before the face of the Most High.** This phrase is illustrated by the wilderness legislation as to matters of trespass, *The cause of both parties shall come before* [*God*] *Elohim, he whom Elohim shall condemn*, &c. (Exod. xxii. 9). The phraseology obviously designates judges as acting in place of *the Judge of all the earth*, and is found used in later times (Ps. lxxxii. 6). **To subvert a man in his cause**, to act unfairly towards another in the ordinary pursuits of life, **the Lord approveth not.** Questioning this translation, Keil renders, **Doth not the Lord look [to such doings as these]?**

(י) Ver. 37. The reason for not mentioning any name of God, as in vers. 1–17, is now wholly dispensed with, and He is presented as conditionating all events. He observes man's dealings with his neighbours. He provides that *every transgression and disobedience receive a just recompense of* reward. No injustice is permissible. If a man or nation could devise and carry out their own commands, then evil or good would come in spite of God. **But who is he**

that saith and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded [it]? His will is supreme. So it follows:—

Ver. 38. **From the mouth of the Most High does not the evil and the good come?** It is a term of the age-lasting problem. He lets evil be done and punishes the evil-doer. He must work out His will, for He works within us to will and do that which is good. In both good and evil we are in close contiguity with God.

Ver. 39. The right interpretation partly depends on whether or not we read this verse as one question. Both the Authorised Version and the Revised Version take the former course. The Hebrew renders this doubtful. It would warrant a division. **For what should a living man,** one in life's school, and with all the possibilities of the education he is receiving from the Lord, **complain?** Let every one come to a more manly position, and they would see it needful **to sigh over their sins.** Sin brings on men the evils really to be lamented, and *the space given* should be filled up with *repentance.*

(כ) Ver. 40. The remnant, who were referred to in ver. 22, carry out here the suggestion just made, that sighing, not over sufferings but over sins, is the becoming utterance for every one. The sorrows and pains endured were resultants from the sins of all the people, and thus a joint resolve and confession is made. Only as men see that they *have strayed like lost sheep* will they truly say, **Let us search and try our ways,** yet not delay in that effort, however genuine it may be, but **let us return unto Jehovah,** the whole way back, with no halt half-way, with no reserves for self.

Ver. 41. Such a return merges into soul-moving prayer—prayer that is not only "the motion of a hidden fire trembling in the breast" or "the upward glancing of an eye," but also manifests itself by some outwardness. The emotion is the chief element in any suitable external gesture. **Let us lift up our hearts with our hands unto God in the heavens,** satisfied that our help is not sent from any earthly sanctuary, but from *within the veil.*

Ver. 42. A vision of God throws a white light upon the dark records of past life. In that light men are forced to pass God's judgment on themselves. *I have brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.* God's rule and man's treason are confronted, and man is condemned to suffer. As for us, **We have transgressed and rebelled;** as for Thee, **Thou hast not pardoned;** a phrase which intimates that He would scourge into the way of righteousness, if no other method avails, and that Israel was then under His chastising rod. He is *ready to pardon,* and the withholding pardon is not His desire, but a "natural sequence" of baffled instructions and warnings—of a deadened spiritual faculty which turns His grace into a penalty.

(ם) Ver. 43. **Thou hast covered with anger,** whether Himself or us is not clear, but as the next clause, **and pursued us,** mentions the latter, it may be preferable to regard the people as wrapped round with a garment woven in the loom of wrath, and which marked them out as the objects to be chased for punishment.

Ver. 44. There had been cries for relief (ver. 41), but unavailing, for **Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud;** *clouds and darkness are round about* Him when He displays His royal righteousness and judgment in burning up His adversaries (Ps. xcvii. 2, 3). That cloud is a barrier [preventing] **prayer from passing through** to His mercy-seat.

Ver. 45. Troubles are accumulated upon the nation. Rejected prayers signify condemnation of their religiousness. It is not the act, but the motive and purpose which determine the relation of the worshipper to the Worshipped. Ritual may be punctiliously carried out, and hide God instead of helping to reveal Him. When He hides His face, they are troubled, and, as if He would exhibit a striking illustration before the world of what will result from disobedience to His will, **Thou hast made us the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the peoples.** Treated as worthless, like Paul and his brethren in Christ (1 Cor. iv. 13), but these were *more than conquerors through Him who loved them.*

(ם) Vers. 46-48 present significant intimations of their base condition. **Enemies** making sport of them, **fear and pitfalls** surrounding them, and the oft-recurring feeling of utter **destruction** instigating tears shed as copiously as **rivers of water.**

(ע) Ver. 49. The excessive weeping is continuous. **Mine eye poureth down** tears, and that **without interruption.** Nor will the sound of weeping be stanched, except when his undercurrent of hope reaches its terminus.

Ver. 50. **Till Jehovah looks down and beholds from heaven.** When He sees the bearing and result of afflictions on His Name's glory, then He *hears the sighing of the prisoner.* For *He will not contend for ever, neither will He be always wroth.*

Ver. 51. Beyond what the eye shows externally it exerts influence upon *the inward part.* **Mine eye hurts my soul:** not in the rather jejune sense that the flood of tears had made the eye painful, and that pain was felt in the soul; but the soul was pained because of the eye beholding the sad lot of the more delicate and defenceless part of the population, the **daughters of my city.**

(צ) Ver. 52. **They have hunted me down like a bird** is hunted when pursued with the eagerness of those who are my enemies without cause, and who will not relax efforts till they catch the quarry.

Ver. 53. **He was haled to prison by them. They have cut off my life in the pit. Shut in**

from all activities and society, he was as a man dead, as in a tomb over which they have **cast a stone on me**. Taking such illustrations to be chiefly figurative, yet here the first clause is a probable allusion to the treatment of Jeremiah (chap. xxxviii. 6), and the second may refer to an unmentioned incident of the same time, for which corroboration may be found in the case of Daniel (chap. vi. 17.)

Ver. 54. The peril was aggravated by **waters that flowed over my head**; the plural perhaps indicating the influx of a spring and the condensation of vapour in the closeness of a pit. In a state so desperate to the eyes of flesh, I said, **I am cut off** *as a man that has no help* (Ps. lxxxviii. 4), as He was who became sin for us (Isa. liii. 8).

The remaining verses of the chapter take the form of prayer, as at the close of Chapters I. and II. In it there are thanksgivings for relief (vers. 55–58), an appeal because of the evil which enemies had done and were doing (vers. 59–63), and a call for recompense therefor (vers. 64–66).

(פ) Ver. 55. **I called upon thy name, O Jehovah,** asking with some true idea of what the words and works of the God of Israel revealed concerning Himself, suggestive, too, of the manner in which the Lord Jesus would have His friends to pray—*Ask the Father in My name*—**out of the depths of the pit** into which he had been thrown.

Ver. 56. A more true position is secured than that which was held previously (vers. 8 and 44). **My voice thou heardest** at that time when I besought thee with my spirit and voice, **Hide not**—close not—**thine ear at my breathing**—my sighing for relief—**at my cry.** It is questionable if the rendering, *Hide not thine ear for my cry for relief*, is not rather an explanation than a fair version.

Ver. 57. **Thou drewest near in the day I called upon thee.** Only spiritual apprehension of God as He who is behind all events and *plenteous in mercy* can bring a conviction of accepted prayer. The heart is then in a state to hear His comforting words, **Thou saidst, Fear not.**

(ר) Ver. 58. There were rights to be maintained, wrongs to be redressed, and in both help was received from a present God. **Thou, O Jehovah, hast pleaded**—contended for—**the causes of my soul.** One thing had hurt his soul (ver. 51), but others also saddened and weakened thought and effort, and the Lord had counteracted them. He had also interfered when hope of living was cut off, **Thou hast redeemed my life** by Thy power over all.

Ver. 59. Trials are not things of the past only. Under their continuous pressure endurance is sought for in the truth that the eye and ear of the Lord are ever open for all sights and sounds. **Thou, O Jehovah, hast seen my wrong**, that which is done to me, and that sight forms a plea for the righteous sentence of Him who *sitteth on the throne judging right.*

Ver. 60. There was the keenest of **vengeance** in the treatment to which the Lord's servant was subjected, and there were **devices against me**; but it was a certain fact that the All-seeing One had observed every secret or open scheme.

(ש) Ver. 61. The revengeful, bad feeling expressed itself in reviling words. **Thou hast heard their reproach, O Jehovah,** and all the evil machinations they framed **against me.**

Ver. 62 is a variant expression of the idea of the former verse, *Thou hast heard* the words **of the lips of those that rose up against me,** and **their meditation,** which occupied their minds **all the day.**

Ver. 63. **Their downsitting and their uprising behold thou,** all their proceedings when at rest, and when they get up to do what they resolve. In hilarious and scornful mood they taunt and deride me; **I am their song.** It was not a momentary outburst of passion, not one hour's lapse into jocoseness, but the tenor of the life which was manifested.

(ת) Ver. 64. The evil life cannot pass without condemnation. **Thou wilt render a recompense to them, O Jehovah.** A man may pray that revilings and machinations may be thwarted, not from a desire for personal revenge, but from the knowledge that *striving with the Maker* incurs guilt and fixes the destiny of the striver **according to the work of their hands,** reaping what they sow (2 Tim. iv. 14).

Ver. 65. **Thou wilt give them blindness** [Heb. a covering] **of heart,** that which is turned into a veil (2 Cor. iii. 14) by their not *becoming sons of the light*, by their walking in darkness *into the ditch.* **Thy curse to them.** *Cursed be the man who maketh flesh his arm.*

Ver. 66. *Evil shall slay the wicked.* **Thou wilt pursue them in anger and destroy them,** so that the wicked may be no more in Thy dominion under the heavens of **Jehovah.** *So let thine enemies perish, O Jehovah, and thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth.*

HOMILETICS.

The Man of Affliction.

(Verses 1–3.)

It is given to some men to catch and idealise the poetic instinct of a nation, to gather to a focus the ideas that have been dimly floating in the national mind,

and, in words of burning passion, to express what all have been vaguely feeling, but none have been able hitherto to clothe in fitting speech. Another class of men represent the chivalric and military characteristics of a nation; another the judicial and ruling types. Jeremiah, distinguished as poet, prophet, and patriot, acquired immortal distinction in the annals of the Hebrew nation as the Man of Sorrow. In him the unparalleled sufferings of Judea seemed concentrated and individualised. His mournful dirge, sung in the minor key, gave voice, with lavish variety of imagery and felicity of phrase, to the overwhelming anguish of a distracted and ruined people. In this sublime elegy the poet-prophet touches the deepest woe of the sufferer in all ages, and provides it with adequate expression. Ewald justly remarks: "Very probably the prophet draws much of what he says from his own experience, but the whole that he sets forth is more than his own personality; it is the type and pattern of every individual. And here, therefore, is the summit and turning-point of the whole Book of Lamentations." When the soul finds words in which to breathe out its sorrow, the oppression is already relieved. The hope of deliverance begins to dawn. Observe in this paragraph—

I. **That the man of affliction regards his sufferings as the result of the Divine anger.** "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath" (ver. 1). It is the rod of His anger to chastise and correct, not the sword to utterly destroy. Even in the manifestation of His wrath God seeks to restore the sinner. The last stroke of His anger must be painful, alarming, crushing; the more so that it is felt to be so just. Behind the dark frown of the Almighty the light of mercy shines. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." The most hopeful feature of affliction is the moment when the sufferer recognises the hand of God in it; when he acknowledges it as the fruit of personal sin. Then it is that wrath gives place to mercy: punishment is disarmed by pardon. Sin is antagonism to God, and merits nothing but wrath. A genuine repentance is the open door of escape.

II. **That the man of affliction is plunged into bewildering gloom.** "He hath led me and brought me into darkness, but not into light" (ver. 2). The darkness of suffering had a realistic meaning for Jeremiah, as he remembered the miseries of his incarceration in the dungeon (Jer. xxxvii. 15, 16; xxxviii. 6, 10–13). But the language is a metaphorical description of afflictions in general, and is frequently employed in Scripture. In the most graphic and explicit terms the prophet foretold the experience he here describes (Jer. xiii. 15, 16). Suffering is a dark enigma that baffles the wisest to solve. It is an aggravation of suffering when it has to be endured in darkness. We have heard of a strong man who had braved all kinds of dangers by land and sea, who was absolutely afraid of being alone in the dark: he had no fear of anything he could see, but was in mortal dread of the unseen. Darkness overawes the most volatile. A party of courtiers of Louis XV. were once gathered round Cassini to witness an eclipse from the terrace of the Paris observatory, and were laughing at the populace, whose cries were heard as the light began to fade, when, as the unnatural gloom came quickly on, silence fell on them too, the panic-terror striking through their laughter. There is nothing so distressing, so oppressive, so bewildering, so hopeless to contend with, as darkness.

III. **That the man of affliction is smitten with repeated strokes of the Divine Hand.** "Surely against me is He turned; He turneth His hand against me all the day" (ver. 3). It is not one stroke of affliction, but many, and these frequently repeated. Trouble never comes alone; it is often attended with a crowd of ills. Before we can recover from one calamity we are stricken with another. It may be difficult to find the kind heart behind the strong hand; but it is there. Not one blow more than is necessary will be permitted to fall. The most prolonged and reiterated suffering will cease as soon as its purpose is answered. While it continues there should be prayerful searchings of heart.

LESSONS.—1. *The fact of suffering testifies to the fact of sin.* 2. *Much of our suffering occasioned by witnessing the sufferings of others.* 3. *Suffering is a blessing when it brings us nearer to God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 1. Ecce homo. I. *Consider the generality of affliction in the nature thereof.* We met all generally in the first treason against ourselves in Adam's rebellion; and we met all, too, in the second treason—the treason against Jesus Christ. All our sins were upon His shoulders. All the evils and mischiefs of life come for the most part from this—that we think to enjoy those things which God hath given us only to use. III. *Consider affliction as bearing on man.* "I am the man that hath seen affliction." It was that man that is denoted and signified in that name that hath lain under affliction, and therefore no kind of man was likely to escape. Man carries the spawn and seed and eggs of affliction in his own flesh, and his own thoughts make haste to hatch them and bring them up. We make all our worms snakes, all our snakes vipers, all our vipers dragons by our murmuring. III. *Consider affliction in its special application to one man.* That man the prophet Jeremiah, one of the best of men. As he was submitted to these extraordinary afflictions, we see that no man is so necessary to God as that God cannot come to His ends without that man. God can lack and leave out any man in His service. The best of our wages is adversity, because that gives us a true fast, and a right value of our prosperity. Jeremy had it; the best of his rank must. No man is excused of subsequent afflictions by precedent, nor of falling into more by having borne some already. Our afflictions are as beggars; they tell others, and send more after them. When the hand of God was upon Jeremiah he declared God's handwriting; not only to his own conscience by acknowledging that all these afflictions were for his own sins, but by acknowledging to the world that God had laid such and such afflictions upon him. St. Ambrose, in a journey from Milan to Rome, passed some time one evening with his host, who bragged he had never had any cross in his life. Ambrose at once removed to another house, protesting that either the man was very unthankful to God that would not take knowledge of His corrections, or that God's measure was by this time full, and would surely, soundly, and suddenly pour down all together. IV. *Consider the weight and vehemence of afflictions.* 1. They are aggravated in that they are the Lord's. They are inevitable; they cannot be avoided; they are just, and cannot be pleaded against; nor can we ease ourselves with any imagination of our innocency, as though they were undeserved. 2. They are in His rod. Our murmuring makes a rod a staff, and a staff a sword, and that which God presented for physic, poison. 3. They are inflicted by the rod of His wrath. Though there be properly no anger in God, yet God is said to do a thing in anger when He does it so as an angry man would do it. It is the highest extent of affliction that we take God to be angrier than He is. V. *Consider the comforts we have in afflictions.* "I am the man that hath seen affliction." 1. That we see our afflictions, we understand, consider them. We see that affliction comes from God, and that it is sent that we may see and taste the goodness of God. 2. That, though afflicted, we still retain our manhood. God may mend thee in marring thee; He may build thee up in dejecting thee; He may infuse another manhood into thee, so that thou canst say, "I am that Christian man; I am the man that cannot despair since Christ is the remedy." 3. That the rod of God's wrath is also the rod of His comfort and strength (Micah vii. 14; Ps. xlv. 6; Ps. xxiii. 4).—*Donne.*

— **God and human suffering:** 1. Often brought into strange relationship. 2. Suffering is a significant revelation of how God views human sin. 3. Suf-

fering may draw man nearer to, or drive him farther from, God.

Vers. 2, 3. **The mystery of suffering.** I. *Impossible to solve by human speculations.* "Into darkness, but not into light." II. *Increased by the difficulty of accounting for the part God takes in it.* "He hath led me and brought me into darkness, but not into light" (ver. 2). III. *Intensified by the apparent persistency of the Divine severity.* "Surely against me is He turned; He turneth His hand against me all the day" (ver. 3).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**God's anger man's heaviest affliction.** God's anger exerts itself by embittering afflictions Every affliction is of itself a grievance, and a breach made upon our happiness; but there is sometimes a secret energy that so edges and quickens its afflictive operation that a blow levelled at the body shall enter into the very soul. What is the reason that David is sometimes so courageous that "though he walks through the valley of the shadow of death, he fears no evil;" and, at another time, God no sooner "hides His face, but he is troubled"? What is the cause that a man sometimes breaks through a greater calamity, and at another time the same person fails and desponds under a loss of the same nature? Whence can this be, but that God infuses some more grains of His wrath into the one than into the other?—*South.*

— **The Divine anger.** Anger is the whetstone of strength; in an equality of other terms, it will make a man prevail. Nothing is able to stand before a fire which is once enraged; so is it when the fire of the Lord's revenge breaks forth upon the enemies of His Son. Add hereunto our disposition and preparedness for the wrath of God. Far easier is it to make a print in wax than in an adamant; to kindle a fire in dry stubble than in green wood. Wicked men have fitted themselves for wrath, and are procurers and artificers of their own destruction.—*Bishop Reynolds.*

Darkness and danger. Sailing once along a coast where a friend had suffered shipwreck, the scene which recalled his danger filled us with no fear; because, while his ship, on the night she ran ashore, was cutting her way through the densest fog, we were ploughing the waters of a silver sea, where noble headlands, pillared cliffs, scattered islands, and surf-beaten reefs stood bathed in the brightest moonshine. There was no danger just because there was no darkness.—*Guthrie.*

Darkness precedes light. The Lord ofttimes makes everything as dark as it can become, just that presently the light may shine more brilliantly. Ishmael faints before Hagar finds the well. Joseph is left in prison and oblivion before being raised to dignity. The Assyrian host surrounds Jerusalem ere they are smitten by the angel. Jeremiah sinks into the pit before he is placed on a rock. Violent persecution of the Christians preceded the triumph of the Gospel. Mediæval darkness preceded the dawn of the Reformation.—*Oosterzee.*

Affliction ripens character. There is a certain mellowness which affliction sheds upon the character, a softening that it effects of all the rougher and more repulsive asperities of our nature, a delicacy of temperament into which it often melts and refines the most ungainly spirit. It is not the pride of aspiring talent that we carry to heaven with us; it is not the lustre of a superiority which dazzles and commands that we bear with us there. It is not the eminencé of any public distinction or the fame of lofty and successful enterprise; and should these give undue confidence to man or throw an aspect of conscious and complacent energy over him, he wears not yet the complexion of Paradise; and should God select him as His own, He will send some special affliction that may chasten him out of all which is uncongenial with the place of blessedness, and at length reduce him to its unmingled love and its adoring humility. The character is purified by the simple process of passing through the fire. "And when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."—*Chalmers.*

Suffering a mystery. As the Egyptian who carried something wound up

In his napkin answered him who demanded what it was, that he covered it to the end that no man should see it; so likewise must we learn that if there be anything hidden and laid up in the works and dealings of God, it is of purpose kept from us, to the end that we should not be too curious to inquire after it; that it is far better to be utterly ignorant herein than to have all the knowledge thereof that may be.—*Cawdray.*

HOMILETICS.

The Bewilderment of Grief.

(Verses 4–9.)

I. **Is accompanied with intense physical suffering.** "My flesh and my skin hath He made old; He hath broken my bones" (ver. 4). The skin is wrinkled and worn, in this case not with age, but with excessive grief; and the suffering which in the preceding verses was represented as a slow wasting of strength, has now reached the stage of acute pain, such as is caused by the breaking of bones. It is a pitiable sight to see a nation or an individual growing prematurely old. This is not done by hard, honest, healthy work, but by sorrow and suffering. The strongest and most beautiful physical form rapidly shrinks and withers under the stroke of a great and overwhelming grief. A sudden calamity has been known to turn the hair grey in a single night, and to impose the wreck of years on the bewildered and moaning sufferer.

II. **Is as of one immured in prison, from which all efforts to escape are futile** (vers. 5, 7, 9). The prisoner is enclosed and fenced in with a solid wall as of hewn stone, but it is a wall of bitterness and weariness. There are paths, dark and tortuous, and as he gropes along them with the dim hope of finding an outlet, he finds himself in a maze which brings him back, after long and weary wandering, to the place whence he started. Like Byron's Prisoner of Chillon—

> "It was liberty to stride
> Along my cell from side to side,
> And up and down, and then athwart,
> And tread it over every part;
> And round the pillars one by one,
> Returning where my walk begun."

Grief fetters the soul as with a heavy chain. It may chafe and fret and tug to very weariness in the effort to obtain release; but in vain: the bondage remains. If we walk in the crooked paths of sin, we shall ultimately find ourselves enclosed within the crooked paths of sorrow, from which we shall be powerless to escape.

III. **Is as of one buried in a dismal sepulchre.** "He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old" (ver. 6). Grief has worn down the sufferer to the semblance of a skeleton, and he regards himself as a corpse laid in the dark chambers of the grave—dead, buried, and forgotten.

> "For all was blank and bleak and gray,
> It was not night, it was not day,
> It was not even the dungeon-light,
> So hateful to my heavy sight,
> But vacancy absorbing space,
> And fixedness without a place;
> There were no stars, no earth, no time,
> No check, no change, no good, no crime;
> But silence and a stirless breath,
> Which neither was of life nor death;
> A sea of stagnant idleness,
> Blind, boundless, mute, and motionless!"—*Byron.*

Excessive grief darkens and dulls every faculty, and robs life of all its charm There are some sorrows from which death is a merciful release.

IV. **The loudest calls for help are disregarded.** "Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer" (ver. 8). The walls of his prison are so thick that the loudest cries cannot pierce them; they are unheard and unheeded. It intensifies the bewilderment of grief when the most earnest cries for help bring no relief. A short time ago the dead body of a stalwart Scotch shepherd was found buried in the snow on the Ayrshire hills, within a short distance of his own home. Two days before, when walking homewards, he was overtaken with a snowstorm, and it is supposed must have been dazed by the fury of the tempest, and lost his way. It is distressing to think of his desperate struggles for life and his exhausting shouts for help, but all in vain. It is a painful phase in the mystery of suffering when God seems so indifferent to our prayers, and so slow to help. But even in this we are led by-and-bye to recognise the Divine justice and mercy.

LESSONS.—1. *The body sympathises with the sufferings of the soul.* 2. *Much of the suffering of life must be borne alone.* 3. *It is the bitterest ingredient in suffering when there is no prospect of relief.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 4–6. **The ravages of sorrow:** I. *Destroy the freshness and bloom of youth.* "My flesh and my skin hath He made old." II. *Inflict acutest pain.* "He hath broken my bones" (ver. 4). III. *Oppress the soul with bitterness and toil.* "He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travel" (ver. 5). IV. *Overshadow the individual life with the gloom of the grave.* "He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old" (ver. 6).

Vers. 7–9. **A baffled sufferer:** I. *He is enclosed and fettered.* "He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out; He hath made my chain heavy" (ver. 7). II. *His cries for help are unavailing.* "Also when I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer" (ver. 8). III. *He is in a maze of tortuous paths, from which there is no outlet.* "He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, He hath made my paths crooked" (ver. 9).

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Causes of grief.** We fancy that all our afflictions are sent us directly from above; sometimes we think it in piety and contrition, but oftener in moroseness and discontent. It would be well, however, if we attempted to trace the causes of them; we should probably find their origin in some region of the heart which we never had well explored, or in which we had secretly deposited our worst indulgences. The clouds that intercept the heavens from us come not from the heavens, but from the earth.—*Landor.*

A great sorrow. Henry I., on his return from Normandy, was accompanied by a crowd of nobles and his son William. The *White Ship*, in which the prince embarked, lingered behind the rest of the royal fleet, while the young nobles, excited with wine, hung over the ship's side taunting the priest who came to give the customary benediction. At last the guards of the king's treasure pressed the vessel's departure, and, driven by the arms of fifty rowers, it swept swiftly out to sea. All at once the ship's side struck on a rock at the mouth of the harbour, and in an instant it sank beneath the waves. One terrible cry, ringing through the stillness of the night, was heard by the royal fleet, but it was not till the morning that the fatal news reached the king. He fell unconscious to the ground, and rose *never to smile again!*

Secret grief. If the internal griefs of every man could be read, written on his forehead, how many who now excite envy would appear to be objects of pity!—*Metastasio.*

Grief irksome, but needful. A friend was asked concerning a beautiful horse feeding on the pasture with a clog on

its foot, "Why do you clog such a noble animal?" The reply was, "I would a great deal sooner clog him than lose him; he is given to leap hedges." That is why God clogs His people. He would rather clog them than lose them; for if He did not, they would leap and be gone.—*Spurgeon.*

The sufferer baffled by temptation. A time of affliction is a time of temptation. Satan will not be wanting in any opportunity or advantage of setting upon the soul. When Pharaoh heard that the people were entangled in the wilderness, he pursued them; and when Satan sees a soul entangled with its distresses and troubles, he thinks it his time and hour to assault it. He seeks to winnow, and comes when the corn is under the flail. Reckon, therefore, that, when trouble cometh, the prince of this world cometh also. Then is the time to take the shield of faith, that we may be able to quench his fiery darts. If they be neglected, they will inflame the soul.—*John Owen.*

Grief, its uses. What! would you choose that you alone may fare better than all God's saints? that God should strew carpets for your nice feet only, to walk into your heaven, and make that way smooth for you which all patriarchs, prophets, evangelists, confessors, Christ Himself, have found rugged and bloody! Away with this self-love, and come down, you ambitious sons of Zebedee, and, ere you think of sitting near the throne, be content to be called unto the cross. Now is your trial. Let your Saviour see how much of His bitter portion you can pledge. Then shall you see how much of His glory He can afford you. Be content to drink of His vinegar and gall, and you shall drink new wine with Him in His kingdom.—*Bishop Hall.*

— As snow is of itself cold, yet warms and refreshes the earth, so afflictions, though in themselves grievous, yet keep the soul of the Christian warm and make it fruitful. Let the most afflicted know and remember that it is better to be preserved in brine than to rot in honey.—*Salter.*

— After a forest fire has raged furiously, it has been found that many pine cones have had their seeds released by the heat, which ordinarily would have remained unsown. The future forest sprang from the ashes of the former. Some Christian graces, such as humility, patience, sympathy, have been evolved from the sufferings of the saints. The furnace has been used to fructify.

HOMILETICS.

JEHOVAH AS A FOE.

(Verses 10–13.)

I. **Is aware of every effort to escape out of His power.** "He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places" (ver. 10). The afflicted one compares himself to a fugitive striving to escape from his miseries, but baffled at every turn. Finding his way blocked up by a solid wall, he plunges into the uncertain paths of the forest, only to find himself exposed to the rapacity of beasts of prey. In every direction he is menaced with enemies; to turn back is as dangerous as to press forward. Exhausted and bewildered, he is ready to sink with terror and despair. Woe to the man who has made an enemy of Jehovah! His most frantic efforts to escape are in vain. He is everywhere threatened by the law he has violated, and its penalties lie about his path like wild beasts, ready to seize him as their victim.

II. **Alarms by the suddenness and violence of His attack.** "He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces. He hath made me desolate" (ver. 11). The figure of the lion is still maintained. Aware of its presence, the startled fugitive turns aside, only to find himself suddenly pounced upon and torn in pieces, so that, stupified with terror and pain, he is powerless to flee. "He

hath made me *desolate*," a favourite word with Jeremiah, occurring more than forty times in his Prophecy, and five times in Lamentations (ch. i. 4, 13, 16; iv. 5; v. 18). The root meaning of the word is appalled, astonied, stupified, struck dumb with terror. The impenitent wicked are every moment in imminent peril. The doom of destruction is already declared against the workers of iniquity, and that destruction shall come "unawares, as a whirlwind, suddenly and swiftly" (*cf.* Ps. xxxv. 8; Prov. i. 27, x. 29, xxi. 15; 1 Thess. v. 3; 2 Pet. ii. 1). Christ is the refuge of the sinner, immediately accessible, and in Him there is invulnerable security.

III. **Is an unerring marksman.** "He hath bent His bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow" (ver. 12). The simile of the lion naturally suggests that of the hunter. When the smitten fugitive is under the paw of the lion, the hunter comes, but not to deliver him. It is not the beast of prey, but the poor mangled victim which is the mark for his arrows. The Mohammedan Caliph Aaly was once asked, "If the heavens were a bow and the earth the cord thereof, if calamities were arrows, man the butt for those arrows, and the holy blessed God the unerring marksman, where could the sons of Adam flee for succour?" The Caliph replied, "The children of Adam must flee unto the Lord." This was the state of unhappy Judah; this is the state of the man who wickedly defies God. There is no escape but by a penitent return to Him whose bow is already bent to punish, and whose arrow reaches its mark with unerring precision.

IV. **Can inflict acutest pain.** "He hath caused the arrows of His quiver to enter into my reins"—*my heart* (ver. 13). God has many arrows; they are swift in their passage, unerring in their aim, and pierce deep. None can wound as God can. In the region where the greatest sin against Him has been committed—in the heart—there the arrows of His judgment penetrate and produce the keenest anguish. "These immediate blows of God upon the soul seem to be those things called in Psalm xxxviii. 2 God's arrows; they are strange, sudden, invincible amazements upon the spirit, leaving such a damp upon it as defies the faint and weak cordials of all creature enjoyments. The wounds which God Himself makes none but God Himself can cure."

LESSONS.—1. *It is vain for the sinner to defy Jehovah.* 2. *Sin cannot evade either detection or punishment.* 3. *The only hope of the sinner is to penitently implore the mercy of Jehovah.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 10, 11. **The dangers of a sinful life.** I. *The agents of punishment are always at hand.* "He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places" (ver. 10). II. *There is no escape from punishment for sin.* "He hath turned aside my ways and pulled me in pieces" (ver. 11). III. *The punishment for sin is sudden and appalling.* "He hath made me desolate" (ver. 11).

Vers. 12, 13. **The certainty of punishment.** I. *Because God is just.* II. *Because God is unerring in His treatment of sin.* "He hath bent His bow and set me as a mark for the arrow" (ver. 12). III. *The punishment will be painfully realised.* "He hath caused the arrows of His quiver to enter into my reins" (ver. 13).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Jehovah a foe to all sin.** God Himself, we have always understood, hates sin with a most authentic, celestial, and eternal hatred—a hatred, a hostility inexorable, unappeasable, which blasts the scoundrel, and all scoundrels ultimately, into black annihilation and disappearance from the sum of things. The path of it is the path of a flaming sword. He that has eyes may see it walking, inexorable, divinely beautiful and divinely terrible, through the chaotic gulf of human history, and everywhere burning, as with unquenchable fire, the false and the

deadworthy from the true and life-worthy, making all human history and the biography of every man a God's cosmos in place of a devil's chaos. So it is in the end; even so to every man who is a man, and not a mutinous beast, and has eyes to see.—*Carlyle.*

The dangers of sin. The favourite sport of Canada in winter is tobogganning. Some of the slides are very steep and look very dangerous, and the sensation of rushing down the hill on the thin strips of basswood is one never to be forgotten. "How do you like it?" asked a Canadian girl of an American visitor, whom she had steered down the steepest slide. "Oh, I would not have missed it for a hundred dollars!" "You'll try it again, won't you?" "Not for a thousand dollars!"

— Mr. Ruskin speaks in his "Love's Meinie" of the little crake, a bird which lays her eggs on an inartificially constructed platform of decayed leaves or stalks of marsh plants, slightly elevated above the water. "How elevated I cannot find proper account; that is to say, whether it is hung to the stems of growing reeds or built on hillocks of soil; but the bird is always liable to have its nest overflown by floods."

The degradation of sin. When the followers of Ulysses degraded themselves by the misuse of pleasures until they fell to the level of the brutes, it is said that Circe, touching them with her wand, turned them into swine. She brought to the surface the inner ugliness, revealed the animal that ruled within.

The bitterness of sin. There is more bitterness following upon sin's ending than ever there was sweetness flowing from sin's acting. You that see nothing but *well* in its commission will suffer nothing but *woe* in its conclusion. You that sin for your profits will never profit by your sins.—*Dyer.*

Divine judgment a painful reality. That which comes immediately from God has most of God in it. As the sun when he darts his beams in a direct perpendicular line does it most forcibly because most immediately, there are terrors upon the mind which flow immediately from God, and are not weakened or refracted by passing through the instrumental conveyance of a second cause, for that which passes through a thing is contracted according to the narrowness of its passage. The terrors here spoken of, not being inflicted by the intermediate help of anything, but being darted forth from God Himself, are by this incomparably more strong and piercing. When God wounds a man by the loss of an estate, of his health, of a relation, the smart is but commensurate to the thing which is lost, poor and finite. But when He Himself employs His whole omnipotence, and is Himself both the archer and the arrow, there is as much difference between this and the former as when a house lets fall a cobweb and when it falls itself upon a man.—*South.*

HOMILETICS.

Complex Phases of Distress.

(Verses 14–17.)

I. The sufferer is the subject of ridicule. "I was a derision to all my people, and their song all the day" (ver. 14). Dropping the use of metaphor for the nonce, the prophet plainly indicates in these words what the arrows were that pierced him to the quick. They were the darts of ridicule, sharpened with envy and poisoned with rancour—a ridicule all the keener as coming from his own people, and revealing the base treachery that had been all along cherished under the mask of professed friendship. It is a deep wound to a sensitive heart to discover the fickleness of perverse human nature. The very people who smile upon and flatter us in our prosperity are the first to curl the lip of scorn and to join those who make sport over our misfortunes. The idol of the crowd to-day

may be the execration of the crowd to-morrow. It is a part of the suffering of the unfaithful to have to endure the contempt of God and man, and the sting of the distress is the consciousness that it is self-induced and richly deserved. Where shall he look for sympathy and help? Not from man. His only refuge is in God.

II. **The sufferer is satiated with pain and sunk in abject humiliation.** "He hath filled me with bitterness, He hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, He hath covered me with ashes" (vers. 15, 16). He is as one glutted with bitter food and stupified with nauseous drinks. An Arabic poet describes a man grievously afflicted as "a pounder of wormwood." His food is so mingled with the grit of the ashes in which it is baked that his teeth are broken in eating it, and he is himself smothered with the ashes into the midst of which he has been thrown down. To the Oriental mind this is a graphic description of acute suffering and shame. Vanity, pride, and disobedience end in humiliation and trouble. "It seems appointed," says Lange, "that much of the highest instruction should come to us, even in the Bible, through the sufferings and struggles of individual men." The anguish of the prophet was a type of the sufferings of a rebellious nation.

III. **The sufferer is robbed of happiness.** "Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace" (ver. 17). Peace in Hebrew has the wider signification of welfare, happiness. Hence it was their salutation in life, "Peace be to thee," and in death was engraved upon their sepulchres, "In peace." Peace with God is the source of permanent and overflowing happiness, and its possession is conditioned on the obedience of faith, for "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." How great is the loss when our peace is gone and our happiness takes wing! It is the loss of that we most highly prize and diligently seek after, for happiness is the object of universal search. Rob a man of his peace, and what is there left to live for? The soul, unloosed from her old moorings, is tossed about like a helpless ship in the troubled sea which cannot rest. Life is an intolerable burden, and, swung in a whirl of black despair, the soul cries out with the distracted patriarch, "Oh, that I might have my request," &c. (Job vi. 8–10).

IV. **The sufferer loses the very idea of good.** "I forgot prosperity" (ver. 17). I forgot what good is, lost the very idea of what it means. There is no enjoyment in the present; there is no hope in the future. It is impossible to conceive a more pitiable and forlorn condition. The prophet has surely reached the bottom of his despair; there is no lower depth. This is the fate of the man who tries to live without God. His views of right and wrong, of liberty and bondage, of prosperity and adversity, are utterly confounded. It is a dangerous experiment for any man to try. Christ is the Hope of humanity. To be without Him is to be without God, and to be in the condition of the Ephesians of a former age, "Having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. ii. 12).

LESSONS.—1. *It is a painful experience to meet with scorn where we expected sympathy.* 2. *There is always something to modify the happiness of life.* 3. *It is one of the saddest results of suffering when the soul loses faith in goodness.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 14, 15. **Ridicule:** 1. Is hard to bear when coming from our enemies. II. Has a special aggravation when it is exultingly employed against us by those we had loved and trusted. III. Overwhelms its victim by its bitterness and ceaseless outflow.

Ver. 17. **The loss of happiness:** I. Is the loss of peace. II. Is the loss of true notions of goodness. III. Is the fate of the obstinately unbelieving.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Triumph over ridicule.** A pious poor man was much

ridiculed on account of his religion. Being asked if these daily persecutions did not make him ready to give up his profession, he replied, "No! Our minister once said in his sermon that if we were so foolish as to permit such people to laugh us out of religion till at last we dropped into hell, they could not laugh us out again."

— What would the nightingale care if the toad despised her singing? She would still sing on, and leave the cold toad to his dank shadows. And what care I for the sneers of men who grovel upon earth? I will still sing on in the ear and bosom of God.—*Beecher.*

Treachery has no pity. Sir Anthony Kingston, the provost-marshal of the Protector, the Earl of Hertford, sent word to the mayor of Bodmin that he would dine with him. He had a man to hang too, he said, and a stout gallows must be ready. The dinner was duly eaten and the gallows prepared. "Think you," said Kingston as they stood looking at it, "think you is it strong enough?" "Yea, sir," quoth the mayor, "it is." "Well, then," said Sir Anthony, "get up; it is for you." The mayor, greatly abashed, exclaimed and protested. "Sir," said Kingston, "there is no remedy; ye have been a busy rebel, and this is appointed for your reward;" and so, without respite or stay, the mayor was hanged.

Suffering and its compensations. Should the Empress determine to banish me, let her banish me; "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." If she will cast me into the sea, let her cast me into the sea; I will remember Jonah. If she will throw me into a burning fiery furnace, the three children were there before me. If she will throw me to the wild beasts, I will remember that Daniel was in the den of lions. If she will condemn me to be stoned, I shall be an associate of Stephen, the proto-martyr. If she will have me beheaded, the Baptist has submitted to the same punishment. If she will take away my substance, "naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return to it."—*Chrysostom.*

The best work comes out of distress. The people of Verona, when they saw Dante in the streets, used to say, "See, there is the man that was in hell!" Ah yes! he had been in hell—in hell enough, in long severe sorrow and struggle, as the like of him is pretty sure to have been. Commedias that come out *divine* are not accomplished otherwise. Thought, true labour of any kind, highest virtue itself, is it not the daughter of pain? Born as out of the black whirlwind; true *effort*, in fact, as of a captive struggling to free himself: that is *thought*. In all ways we are to become perfect through suffering.—*Carlyle.*

Happiness depends on God. Solon said, "No man ought to be called happy till he dies, because he knows not what his life is to be." But the Christian may always call himself happy here because wherever his tent is carried, he need never pitch it where the cloud does not move and where he is not surrounded by a wall of fire. "I will be a wall of fire round about them, and their glory in the midst." They cannot dwell where God is not householder, warder, and bulwark of salvation.

HOMILETICS.

The Dawn of Hope.

(Verses 18–21.)

I. Begins to appear when the soul has reached the verge of despair. "I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord" (ver. 18). When things get to the worst they begin to mend. For some time the affairs of the prophet had been sinking into ever-deepening gloom. His peace and happiness had departed, the memory that they ever existed had perished, and now dark doubts about the Divine goodness had finished the degenerating process. It was a critical moment.

The soul oscillated between utter collapse and the beginning of recovery. It is a mercy the soul is not left to itself in its weakest moments. Help was at hand, and hope began to dawn. All the time the soul was expressing the utmost despondency, it was struggling against despair, and feeling for some ground of confidence and hope. It begins to appear that, after all, trouble is God's method of making known His righteousness and love. A way out of the dungeon is opening.

II. **Indicated by the prayer of the soul for the Divine pity.** "Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall" (ver. 19). *Remember.* It is a prayer to Jehovah, beseeching compassion for the soul that has supped its fill of misery, which it has found as bitter as wormwood and gall. There is hope for man, for the worst of men, when he begins to pray. It is the first step upward in the pathway of deliverance. It may seem a cry of despair, but it is a cry that appeals to the Divine pity, and not in vain. The powers of Omnipotence are put into operation for the soul's rescue.

III. **Evident by the fact of the soul's voluntary humiliation.** "My soul hath them still in remembrance and is humbled in me" (ver. 20). It is borne in upon the sufferer that his extraordinary afflictions are the consequences of sin. The mind oppressed and crippled by a morbid contemplation of its miseries is now transferred to a consideration of their cause, and reflection upon its transgressions bows the soul in conscious shame. A change of theme is a relief to the mentally distressed. The moment the soul becomes concerned about its sins, it becomes anxious about their removal. This anxiety is the dawn of hope.

IV. **Strengthened by the recollection that prayer and penitence are the conditions of deliverance.** "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope" (ver. 21). He has seen his error in murmuring against the bitterness of his adversity. Complaints only increased his misery, but did nothing towards removing it. He now recalls how a sight of his sins had humbled him, and led him to pray for mercy, and knowing that God hears the cry of the sincerely penitent, he begins to cherish the hope of pardon and deliverance. It is in this way that God deals with the sinners of to-day. While men concentrate their thoughts upon their misfortunes, and rail against the Providence whose laws they have so recklessly broken, they shut themselves off from God and from hope; but when they acknowledge and grieve over their sins, and pray to God for the mercy provided for all men in Christ Jesus, they receive not only the hope, but the assurance of salvation.

LESSONS.—1. *Hope is the last link between sanity and utter mental collapse.* 2. *The greatest sufferer is never wholly without hope.* 3. *All true reform must begin in hope.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 18, 19. **Lost hope restored.** I. Hope has its highest realisation in God. II. When sin divorces the soul from God, its hope perishes. III. Only as the soul returns to God is its hope restored.

Vers. 20, 21. **The office of memory:** I. Plays an important part in our mental and spiritual history. II. Helps us to realise the nature and aggravation of our sins. III. Should lead us to a wise and timely humiliation on account of sin. IV. Prepares the way for a brighter and more hopeful future.

Ver. 21. **Memory, the handmaid of hope.** Memory is very often the servant of despondency. She stands like a handmaiden, clothed in sackcloth, presenting to her master a cup of mingled gall and wormwood. Like Mercury, she hastes with winged heel to gather fresh thorns with which to fill the uneasy pillow, and to bind fresh rods with which to scourge the already bleeding heart. There is, however, no necessity for this. Wisdom will transform memory into an angel of comfort. She need not wear a crown of iron; she may encircle her brow with a fillet of

gold, all spangled with stars. We lay it down as a general principle, that if we would exercise our memories we might, in our darkest distress, strike a match which would instantaneously kindle the lamp of comfort. I. **Apply this principle to the believer in deep trouble.** The chapter contains a list of matters the recollection of which brought comfort to Jeremiah. 1. *The fact that, however deep our affliction, it is of the Lord's mercy we are not consumed.* When you are kindling your household fire, before which you hope to sit down with comfort, you do not expect first to kindle the lumps of coal, but you set some lighter fuel in a blaze, and soon the more solid material yields a genial glow; so this thought, which may seem so light to you, may be as the kindling of a heavenly fire of comfort to you who are now shivering in your grief. 2. *His compassions fail not.* This again is not a very high step, but still it is a little in advance of the other, and the weakest may readily reach it. 3. *The Lord is my portion.* One of our kings, high and haughty in temper, had a quarrel with the citizens of London, and thought to alarm them by a dreadful threat that would cow the spirits of the bold burghers, for if they did not mind what they were at, he would remove his court from Westminster. Whereupon the doughty Lord Mayor begged to inquire whether his Majesty meant to take the Thames away, for so long as the river remained, his majesty might take himself where he pleased. Even so the world warns us, you cannot hold out, you cannot rejoice; this trouble shall come and that adversity shall befall. We reply, So long as you cannot take our Lord away, we will not complain. We have now advanced to some degree of hope, but there are other steps to ascend. 4. *The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him.* Let Him smite never so hard, yet if we can maintain the heavenly posture of prayer, we may rest assured that He will turn from blows to kisses yet. Bunyan tells us that when the city of Mansoul was besieged, it was the depth of winter and the roads were very bad; but even then prayer could travel them. No enemy can barricade the road to the King. We are getting into deeper water of joy; let us take another step. 5. *It is good that a man should bear the yoke in his youth.* Why should I dread to descend the shaft of affliction if it leads me to the gold mine of spiritual experience? Why should I cry out if the sun of my prosperity goes down, if in the darkness of my adversity I shall be the better able to count the starry promises with which my faithful God has been pleased to gem the sky. Many a promise is written in sympathetic ink, which you cannot read till the fire of trouble brings out the characters. One step more, and surely we shall then have good ground to rejoice. 6. *The Lord will not cast off for ever.* Who told thee that the night would never end in day? Who told thee that the sea would ebb out till there should be nothing left but a vast tract of mud and sand? Who told thee that the winter would proceed from frost to frost, from snow, and ice, and hail, to deeper snow and yet more heavy tempest? Knowest thou not that day follows night, that flood comes after ebb, the spring and summer succeed to winter? Hope thou then! Hope thou ever, for God fails thee not. Thus memory may be, as Coleridge calls it, "the bosom-spring of joy." II. **To the doubting Christian who has lost his evidences of salvation:** 1. *Call to remembrance matters of the past.* At the south of Africa the sea was generally so stormy when the frail barks of the Portuguese went sailing south that they named it the Cape of Storms; but after that cape had been well rounded by bolder navigators, they named it the Cape of Good Hope. In your experience you had many a Cape of Storms, but you have weathered them all, and now let them be a Cape of Good Hope to you. 2. *Recall the fact that others have found the Lord true to them.* 3. *Remember that if you look within you will see some faint traces of the Holy Spirit's hand.* The complete picture of Christ is not there, but cannot you see the crayon sketch,

the outline, the charcoal marks? Where God the Holy Ghost has done as much as that, He will do more. 4. *Recollect that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.* If I am not a saint, I am a sinner; and if I may not go to the throne of grace as a child, I will go as a sinner. III. A few words to seekers. Oh, that I had a voice like the trumpet of God that shall wake the dead at last! If I might only have it to utter one sentence, it would be this one, "In Christ is your help found." As for you, there never can be found anything hopeful in your human nature. It is death itself, it is rottenness and corruption. Turn, turn away your eyes from this despairing mass of black depravity and look to Christ.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**The misery of hopelessness.** Abraham Lincoln, when a young man, was subject to terrible fits of depression. In one of his letters he writes: "I am now the most miserable being living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall ever be better I cannot tell; I awfully forbode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better."

Hope presupposes faith. They cannot exist apart. Hope is the balloon of the soul, soaring majestically into the heavens, scanning scenes of beauty and grandeur never beheld by our earth-bound senses, and faithfully reporting to the soul the state of affairs in the skies; but it is a captive balloon, and the connecting cords are firmly held in the hand of faith. The loftiest flights and the swing of what may seem the most eccentric gyrations of hope are held in check by the friendly, the sympathetic, and unswerving grasp of faith. "My dear Hope," says Faith, "it is very nice for you to be up there basking in the cloudless sunshine and drinking in the melody of the ascending lark as it ripples up the heights; and I like you to be there. I could never get there myself; and you tell me of things I should never otherwise know, and they do me good. But remember, I cannot let you go. We are necessary to each other, and cannot do without each other. If you were to break away from me, you would vanish like vapour into space, and I should be left forlorn and powerless."

Hope clings to us to the last. When John Knox lay dying, one of the friends around his death-bed asked the question, "Hast thou hope?" The veteran reformer was too weak to speak—the moment for speech was gone; but the expiring saint raised his finger and pointed upwards, and so passed triumphantly to the skies.

Prayer a preparation for conflict. A soldier in the Confederate army was once asked what was the secret of Stonewall Jackson's influence over his men. "Does your general abuse you, swear at you to make you march?" "Swear!" answered the soldier. "No; Ewell does the swearing; Stonewall does the praying! When Stonewall wants us to march, he looks at us soberly, just as if he were sorry for us, and says, 'Men, we've got to make a long march.' We always know when there is going to be a long march and right smart fighting, for old Jack is powerful on prayer just before a big fight."

Memory of victory inspiring. During the last days of William IV. the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo occurred. Rousing himself upon remembrance of it, the dying King requested that some of the French standards taken there should be brought to him, which when he looked at and handled he said, "I feel much better."

HOMILETICS.

THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS.

(Vers. 22–24.)

I. Evidenced in our preservation in the midst of the greatest afflictions. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (ver. 22). The same Divine

power that called us into being is exerted every moment to sustain that being. The enemies of our life threaten us every moment. We walk in the midst of secret and unsuspected dangers. A whiff of subtle and mysterious vapour, and the throb of life is for ever stilled; the crumbling of a few inches of shale beneath our feet, and we are precipitated into the abyss of death; the slightest overbalance on the slippery deck, and we are immersed in a watery grave; the accidental divergence of the knife or firing of the rifle, and we receive our death-wound; the horse stumbles, and the rider lies dead at its feet; the lightning flashes, and the unsuspecting passer-by is stricken into a livid corpse; the careering locomotive leaves the metals, and many homes are darkened with desolation and sorrow; the volcano opens its treacherous side, and thousands are swallowed into the depths of its burning lava. How unfathomable is the mercy and how undeviating the faithfulness that have spared us to this hour! "One shall be taken and another left;" but how is it that others are taken and we are left? How is it that we have been to so many funerals, and no one has yet been to ours?

II. **Revealed in its greatness by the daily renewal of the Divine mercies.** "They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (ver. 23). Our wants are constant; so is the Divine provision. The arrest in the outflow of Divine mercies for a single day would mean unspeakable suffering to millions. The Divine supply is ever ahead of our daily needs. Every Divine blessing has the freshness and the fragrance of the morning about it. "They are new every morning"—unfailing as the morning dawn, bright and joyous as the morning sunshine, brilliant and sparkling as the morning dew, sweet and invigorating as the morning air. Every new day, as it pours its cornucopia of gifts upon the world, is an infallible witness to the Divine faithfulness.

III. **Is the assured foundation of the soul's hope.** "The Lord is my portion, therefore will I hope in Him" (ver. 24). The hope of the prophet began to dawn amidst the deepest gloom when he remembered that God answered prayer (ver. 21); but now it is strengthened and confirmed when he is assured of the constancy of the Divine mercy. Israel's hope of help from Egypt, or from any of her professed allies, was shattered, that she might be taught to seek refuge alone in God. Amid the wreckage of all earthly hopes the soul finds a sure foundation for hope and confidence in the unchangeable mercy and faithfulness of God.

LESSONS.—1. *Affliction which reveals the fickleness of earthly things also reveals the unchanging faithfulness of God.* 2. *Daily mercies are constant reminders of the Divine faithfulness.* 3. *The Divine faithfulness is at once the hope and satisfaction of the soul.*

GELM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 22, 23. The views of a saint in his afflictions. He contemplates—

1. *The lightness of his affliction in comparison of his deserts.*

2. *The multitude of the mercies yet continued to him.*

3. *The unchangeableness of God under all His dispensations.*

4. *The beauty of religion as displayed in these views.*

They compose the mind, elevate the soul, and honour God.—*Simeon.*

Ver. 23. **Dayspring mercies.** I. These words seem to speak of *the inexhaustible wealth of God's forgiveness.* But for the daily renewal of God's mercy to His people they would have been utterly cut off. His faithfulness to the covenant was great beyond all human parallel. No new day would ever brighten and glow over the cowed, comfortless, half-relenting remnant of the holy seed, but for God's readiness to forgive. They had sinned away their covenant birthright, but God's compassion hovered near to restore it again. And is it not ever so with God's people? In times of chastisement and in times of prosperity alike they need to be ever encircled by God's

forgiving grace. Close by one of the great cities of the East there is a large stretch of grass that is always green. Sometimes the showers are rare and scanty, and the thermometer mounts to an appalling height, and one wonders to see the grass green and lush as though it were growing in some English meadow. It is kept so by a heavy dew that never fails to fall in the night-time. And so with our life of consecration. There is no dawn without the dew of abounding love and compassion descending to keep it green. II. These words seem to suggest *the resurcefulness of Divine Providence.* The mercy that is ever fresh to pardon is ever fresh to guide and shape the circumstances in the midst of which the pardoned life is spent. The text is in direct conflict with the clock-work theory of the universe. Providence glories in freshness and originality—it abhors unintelligent routine. The tied-up helm and the sail square-set to the wind are no types of God's providential methods of dealing with us. Life is full of bends and rapids and shallows and whirlpools, and an automatic providence will not meet the terrific emergencies of its swiftly passing moments. Sail and helm alike are in His hand, and answer to His touch through every flashing second. Astronomers at one time puzzled themselves over a problem in solar physics. How was the heat of the sun maintained? It seemed a natural inference that, as it was always giving off heat in stupendous volumes, ultimate exhaustion must one day come. Within recent times the suggestion has found wide acceptance that the sun is constantly drawing meteors, asteroids, and comets to itself, and that the heat is maintained by the impact of these bodies as they fall into the sun. Things come to us from time to time that seem out of all accord with the harmonies around us. Strange difficulties, stumbling-blocks, tribulations, start up in the path of our daily life. These things are drawn into the circle of God's control and government for their solution, and it is in this way that the very glory of God's providence is maintained. III. These words seem to suggest *the unfailing truth and faithfulness of God in His relation to His people.* God's renewed mercies are linked with the morning because the return of the day is one of the most perfect and intelligible symbols of constancy to be found in the economy of Nature. The rains may come and go upon a system to which science has found no clue. Winter sometimes pushes itself far on into the spring. A late spring and an early autumn may squeeze out the summer. A flood may quite change the face of a country. Islands have been known to disappear in some of the convulsions of Nature. The mariner has looked for his landmark, and it is gone. Empires may rise and perish with no hope of a resurrection other than an ignoble disinterment at the hands of the archæologist. But no ill chance can befall the day-spring. And as infallibly as the welcome day-dawn steals at its own hour into our homes, so infallibly do the Divine compassions arise upon the lowly and the contrite. God reflects the benignity of His own face into the flush of dawn, and makes it the parable of a faithfulness upon which you can always count. IV. These words suggest *the unfailing promptness of God's ministrations.* "His mercies are new every morning;" that is, just as soon as, or even before, we begin to need them. We receive our salvation, guidance, and defence, not of our own work, but of His free love. If it were of our own work, we must needs wait for the nightfall before we could receive any recompense. Wages are paid at sunset. But it is all His gift. So the mercy in which we rejoice comes to us with the dawn, before we have done a solitary stroke of work. The regulations of the court at Pekin are so framed as to give to the Chinese Empire an example of promptness and despatch. The emperor always receives his cabinet ministers and councillors at three or four o'clock in the morning—long before day-dawn. And so God awaits His servants with new pardons, new counsels, new honours in His kingdom, long before the day-dawn. An in-

genious botanist, by watching the hours at which certain flowers opened, hit upon the pretty conceit of constructing what he called a flower-clock. God's matchless mercies, like circles of thick-set bloom that break into splendour with a rhythm that never halts, are measuring out the successive hours of our life. No winter comes to blast the flowers, and the clock is never behind time. V. These words suggest *the perpetual freshness of the Divine Nature.* God's compassions are unceasingly new because they well, pure and fair, out of the stainless and infinite depths of His Fatherhood. They have the ever-renewed and living sweetness of His own spring-like nature in them. His daily mercies come to us clothed with the enkindled grace of His own matchless smile, and full of the light of an immortal May-time. He cannot give or do without putting the buoyancy of His own untiring and eternal youth into each boon and act.—*T. G. Selby.*

Ver. 24. (Compared with Deut. xxxii. 9). **Choice portions.** I. **The Lord's portion is His people.** 1. *The Church of God is the Lord's own peculiar and special property.* As a king may have ample possessions, to all of which he has undoubted right, but still has royal demesnes and crown-lands which are in a very special sense his own, so hath the Lord of all a peculiar interest in His saints. They are His by sovereign choice, by purchase and by conquest. 2. *The saints are the objects of the Lord's especial care.* The Lord is the eternal watcher of the universe and never sleeps; yet in a very distinct sense He is the guardian of His Church. 3. *The Church is the object of the Lord's special joy.* I do not read that God delighteth in the cloud-capped mountains or in the sparkling stars, but I do read that He delighteth in the habitable parts of the earth, and His delights are with the sons of men. 4. *God's people are His everlasting possession.* He will never sell His people at any price, nor, if He could have better people instead, would He change them. They are His for ever. II. **The Lord is my portion.** 1. *True believers have the Lord as their sole portion.* St. Augustine was wont very often to pray, "Lord, Give me thyself." A less portion than this would be unsatisfactory. 2. *As God is our only portion, so He is our own portion.* Do not be satisfied with generals; come to particulars. Men go to hell in bundles, but they go to heaven separately. 3. *The Lord is to His people an inherited portion.* We owe it to the fact of our birth—a child of God by being born in the image of His son. 4. *This heritage is ours by choice.* We have chosen God to be our portion. Better to have Christ and a fiery faggot than to lose Him and wear a royal robe. 5. *God is His people's settled portion.* The covenant of day and night may be broken, the waters may again cover the earth, sooner than the decrees of grace be frustrated. *The Lord is my all-sufficient portion.* God fills Himself. If He is all-sufficient in Himself, He must be all-sufficient for us.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Divine faithfulness.** Visiting a dying Christian woman, Dr. John Brown once said to her, "What would you say, Janet, if, after God has done so much for you, He should let you drop into hell?" She calmly replied, "E'en as He likes; but He'll lose more than I will."

— You may be faint and weary, but my God cannot. I may fluctuate and alter as to my frames and feelings, but my Redeemer is unchangeably the same. I might utterly fail and come to nothing if left to myself; but I cannot be so left to myself, for the Spirit of Truth hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." He will renew my strength, either by changing my weakness into strength, or by enduing me with His own power. He is wise to foresee and provide for all my dangers. He is rich to relieve and succour me in all my wants. He is faithful to perfect and perform all His promises.—*Ambrose Serle.*

Divine Providence. It is the fault of the present day to think and to act as if man could do everything, and to forget God's special providence. Hence

that busybodiness which distinguishes the religious world, and prevents that depth of piety which is the result of sober, calm reflection, and which shows itself in doing calmly and unostentatiously, not what seems likely to be attended with the greatest results, but simply the duty our hand findeth to do.—*Dean Hook.*

— Those believers who watch providences will never lack providences to watch.—*Flavell.*

Divine supply in emergencies. St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne was often in great poverty and pinched for food. "Never did man die of hunger who served God faithfully," he would say when night found them supperless in the waste. "Look at the eagle overhead! God can feed us through him, if He will!"—and once, at least, he owed his meal to a large fish that the scared bird let fall.

Want anticipated. The wood-piercing bee will make a tunnel in a tree-trunk twelve or fifteen inches long and half an inch wide, which is divided into ten or twelve cells. An egg with a store of pollen and honey is deposited in each cell, so that as soon as the young bee is born it has its dinner awaiting it!—*Ruskin.*

HOMILETICS.

Three Grades of Goodness.

(Vers. 25–27.)

I. There is the goodness of Jehovah to those who cling to Him. "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him" (ver. 25). God is absolutely and supremely good—good in Himself, good in all things, good at all times. If He is good to all, then He must be especially so to those who wait on Him in conscious dependence and earnestly supplicate His help. There are mysteries about the Divine procedure which we cannot fathom, and we are sometimes tempted to question the goodness of God. But clearer light dispels our doubts, and the more completely we trust in Him the more real and tender and potent does His goodness become. We never know God aright till we trust Him fully.

II. There is the goodness of patient and uncomplaining waiting for God's time of deliverance. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (ver. 26). To indulge in querulous complaints only increases the irritation of our sufferings. Murmuring begets murmuring, and we are apt to blame every one but ourselves. The more we grumble, the farther are we away from goodness. It is only when we are silent and abstain from complaining that we begin to see that our deliverance must come from God, and that it is our wisdom to bide His time and humbly submit to His method. The soul attains goodness by exercising an active and larger faith in the Divine goodness. A clearer apprehension of goodness in God begets a corresponding goodness in the soul that sees it.

III. There is the goodness of being accustomed to the burden of suffering early in life. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (ver. 27). Youth is the period of enjoyment, and it has a pleasure all its own, with its bright and gay romancing, its poetic dreams of beauty and delight, its relishable love of work, its daring enterprise and bold ambitions, its soaring hopes and confident prophecies, its sparkling wit and brimming fun—brilliant and harmless as tropical lightning; buoyant, radiant, joyous youth-time, when every sense is steeped in the intoxicating nectar of innocent rapture, when the whole world shines with the golden glory of perpetual summer, and when life is one long, sweet poem, set to the enchanting movements of exquisite music. But youth has

also its burdens and responsibilities, and its happiness is not destroyed but intensified when it learns to bear with bravery the disappointments and afflictions of life. The youth who has known little of suffering is ill prepared for the stern realities of ordinary life. Early sorrow brings early comfort and peace and strength. The best that is in man is tested and perfected by misfortune.

LESSONS.—1. *God is good in Himself inherently and essentially.* 2. *Man is good only in the degree in which he receives Divine grace and submits to the Divine discipline.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 25. **The Divine goodness.** 1. A grand reality. 2. Continually manifested. 3. Specially revealed to the earnest seeker.

Ver. 26. **The advantages of a state of expectation.** 1. It seems implied that our incapacity of looking into the future has much to do with the production of disquietude and unhappiness. 2. And yet the possession of this power of anticipating the future would be incalculably more detrimental. 3. Our ignorance of what shall happen stimulates exertion. We are so constituted that to deprive us of hope would be to make us inactive and wretched. 4. It is for our advantage that salvation, instead of being a thing of certainty and present possession, must be hoped and quietly waited for. 5. If true believers were withdrawn from earth at the moment of their becoming such, the influences of piety which now make themselves felt through the mass of a population would be altogether destroyed, and the world deprived of that salt which alone preserves it from total decomposition. 6. No fair explanation can be given of the text unless you bring into the account the difference in the portions to be assigned hereafter to the righteous. 7. The continuance of the justified on earth affords them opportunity of rising higher in the scale of future blessedness. 8. Being compelled to hope and to wait is a good moral discipline, so that the exercises prescribed are calculated to promote holiness and ensure happiness. 9. It is good as affording time in which to glorify God. 10. Religion gives a character to hope of which otherwise it is altogether destitute. Hope is a beautiful meteor; but nevertheless this meteor, like the rainbow, is not only lovely because of its seven rich and radiant stripes; it is the memorial of a covenant between man and his Maker, telling us that we are born for immortality, destined, unless we sepulchre our greatness, to the highest honour and noblest happiness. —*Henry Melville.*

Hope and patience. I. *What is meant by the salvation of the Lord?* God's salvation is used very frequently in the Bible for His interposition to save the soul of man from sin. It is not this salvation which is here spoken of, for though a man may be encouraged to hope, he cannot be urged quietly to wait for it. The language of the chapter is not that of a man ignorant of God. It is the salvation which a man needs in any crisis of life, where he suffers under trial, or is threatened with it. Our strength and resources, all possible expedients, have been brought into exercise. The last reserve has been thrown into the battle, and yet it goes against us. It is then the case rises distinctly into the salvation of the Lord. A man who has faith only in worldly resources is powerless here. He must give up in despair, or cast himself on a blind chance. But, for a believing man, there is still a duty and a stay. When he cannot take a step farther in human effort, there is a pathway to the skies, and his heart can travel it. II. *What is meant by these exercises of the soul towards God's salvation—to hope and quietly wait?* 1. The foundation of hope lies in *desire*. But desire may pursue things that can never be objects of hope to us. We can only hope for that which is felt to be possible and reasonable. The next element is *faith*.

But we believe in many things in regard to which we do not hope. Hope is faith with desire pointing out the objects. A third element to make our hope strong is *imagination*. While sin has made this world a charnel-house of corruption or a storehouse of vanities, purity can fill its treasury with divine aspirations which are as grand as they are transcendently real. II. *Quiet waiting*. It is termed in the Bible *patience*. It is the part of hope to seek the future; it is the duty of patience to rest calmly in the present, exercising faith, and giving calm attention to duties. The tamest and most insignificant of daily duties may be made noble and divine when the thought of God and the will of Christ are carried into them. III. *Consider the benefit of uniting these—both to hope and quietly wait.* 1. The one is needful to save the other from sinking into sin. 2. To raise the other to its full strength. 3. It is good now in the depth of the soul, in the conscious assurance that it is better to rest in the hardest of God's ways than to wander at will in our own. 4. It is good in the enhancement of every blessing for which we have to wait. Between your use of the means and the result which you desire there is still a gulf of separation, on the brink of which Patience must sit and look across, waiting God's time and way to pass it.—*John Ker, D.D.*

Ver. 27. **Youth the proper season of discipline.** I. In the principles of true religion. II. In the arts of honest industry.—*Berriman.*

The best burden for young shoulders. The bullocks have to bear the yoke. They go in pairs, and the yoke is borne upon their shoulders. If the bullock is not broken in when young, it will never make a good ploughing ox. So it is good for us when young to learn obedience, to acquire knowledge, and to encounter difficulties and troubles. I. *It is good to be a Christian while you are young.* 1. The man whose heart is conquered by Divine grace early is made happy soon. 2. Is saved from a thousand snares. 3. Is saved from having his shoulders galled with the devil's yoke. 4. Gives him longer time in which to serve God. 5. Enables him to be well established in Divine things. II. *It is good for young Christians that they bear the yoke of Jesus.* 1. They render to Jesus complete obedience from the very first. 2. They attain clear instruction in Divine truth. 3. They serve Christ early. 4. It is good to meet with difficulties and persecution in youth. III. *Practically we are all of us in our youth.* 1. Bearing the yoke, the old Adam is kept in check. 2. We are helpful to others who have known affliction. 3. Will make heaven all the sweeter.—*Spurgeon.*

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **The goodness of God experienced.** A German just converted was greatly surprised at the goodness of God to him, which he now realised. One day he was overheard in prayer saying, "O Lord Jesus! I did not know Thou wert so good!" How general is this ignorance!

Patience conquers. Twenty-five years ago the founder of a college for negroes in America was hunted like a wild beast through the region where his name is now spoken by men of all parties with reverence. Lloyd Garrison was nearly murdered by an infuriated mob for championing the emancipation of the slaves, and years afterwards, in the same city, was made the recipient of its highest honours. Time fights against every tyranny, and in favour of the tyrannised. To endure is to conquer.

Fellow-suffering silences complaints. During one of the campaigns in the American civil war, when the winter weather was very severe, some of Stonewall Jackson's men, having crawled out in the morning from their snow-laden blankets, half-frozen, began to abuse him as the cause of their sufferings. He lay close by under a tree, himself covered with snow, and heard all this; but, without noticing it, presently crawled out too, and, shaking off the snow, made some jocular remark to the nearest men, who had no idea he had ridden up in the night and lain down amongst them! The incident

ran through the army in a few hours, and reconciled his followers to all the hardships of the expedition, and fully re-established his popularity.

Skill acquired in youth. Livy says that at the siege of Samè one hundred slingers were brought from Ægeum, Patræ, and Dymæ. These men, according to the practice of that nation, were exercised from their childhood in throwing with a sling into the open sea the round pebbles which strew the shore. Being accustomed to drive their missiles through circular marks of small circumference placed at a great distance, they not only hit the enemy's heads, but any part of their faces they aimed at. These slings checked the Sameans from sallying out either so frequently or so boldly, insomuch that they would sometimes from the walls beseech the Achæans to retire for a while and be quiet spectators of their fight with the Roman guards.

A brave youth. William Hunter, a London apprentice, was in 1555 ordered by a priest to attend mass. He refused, and one day was found reading the Bible in Brentwood Church. He fled. His father was seized, and to release him the boy returned and surrendered. He was imprisoned for nine months, then offered a bribe by Bishop Bonner if he would recant. To all he opposed a courageous resistance, and was burned at the stake in his native village, retaining to the last his religious sturdiness and bravery.

HOMILETICS.

Resignation.

(Vers. 28–30.)

I. Should be borne in silence, recognising the hand of God in affliction. "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because He hath borne it upon Him" (ver. 28). It is difficult for an active spirit to settle down contentedly and in silence in any kind of circumstances. We cannot rid ourselves of the idea that something is to be done, and we must do it. If our misfortunes come as the result of our own folly, we feel we must do something to repair the damage, little dreaming how utterly useless are all our endeavours. When at length the truth dawns upon us that God is at work in connection with our sufferings, the soul is at once subdued into silence and patiently waits the issue. Something like this was once the experience of the Psalmist (Ps. xxxix. 9).

II. Should be borne with reverential humility, knowing there is hope of deliverance. "He putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope" (ver. 29). The putting the mouth in the dust indicates how completely the soul is prostrated before God in humility and reverential silence. The soul can bear any burden when it knows that the hand of God imposes it, and that He has still hold of it. While we are conscious God is in touch with our burden, there is always hope of its removal. It is when God leaves us to our fate that hope dies. Resignation is no evidence of hopelessness, but rather an evidence how firmly our hope is grounded. We could not so completely cease from all personal effort were we not so fully assured of Divine deliverance.

III. Should be borne without resentment, not shrinking from the bitterest dregs of the cup. "He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him; he is filled full with reproach" (ver. 30). We are to be resigned, but not insensible; submissive, but not apathetic. We are keenly alive to the reproaches heaped upon us by our enemies. Our very resignation is offensive to them, and is made a handle of scorn. It is hard to bear the jeers of others without retaliation. When our sufferings come through our fellow-men, it is but human to resent their attacks with indignation—to meet scorn with scorn. But when we are sensible our troubles come from God, we can more readily submit, and we have grace given to

bear, without resentment, all that it may please Him to impose upon us. Behind the divine severity there is unspeakable gentleness.

LESSONS.—1. *The greatest sorrow must be borne alone and in silence.* 2. *Murmuring and resentment will increase, but not relieve our sufferings.* 3. *A spirit of humble resignation secures the Divine compassion and help.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 28–30. Silent suffering. I. Not the less acute because endured in silence (ver. 28). II. Is bearable when the soul has a glimmering of hope (ver. 29). III. Shows that the sufferer has exhausted every possible ground for complaint (ver. 30).

Ver. 28. **Retirement and silence.**

"What then should be a sinner's course?
Silence to all save himself and his God.
And so also our Lord 'became dumb;'
He still waited upon his Father;
He made as if He had nothing to say.
How much more should we be silent in our guilt!
Thou hast sinned in company,
Learn to do without company at all.
Thou hast dealt rudely with thy God,
Be content to be rudely dealt with.
Thou hast forsaken Him,
Be content to be forsaken.
Thou hast sinned in talk,
Be content to keep silence.
Thou hast sinned in selfish ways,
Be content, nay be glad, to be overlooked,
To be disappointed—forgotten.
The less thou art able to retire at fixed times,
Be the more watchful to do so at occasional times.
Thou hast sinned in boasting,
Be sometimes silent, even from good words.
Thou hast sinned by cowardice,
Force thyself to speak—in truthfulness to confess.
Accept bereavements, separations, estrangements,
As opportunities of penance assigned by Him.
That He may open thy mouth at last,
To shew forth His praise,
And nothing but His praise."

—*Keble.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Resignation to the will of God.** A remarkable instance of Christian resignation was discovered on one particular occasion in the conduct of Archbishop Fenélon. When his illustrious and hopeful pupil, the Duke of Burgundy, lay dead in his coffin, and the nobles of his court, in all the pomp of silent sadness, stood around, the Archbishop came into the apartment, and having fixed his eyes for some time on the corpse, broke out at length in words to this effect—"There lies my beloved prince, for whom my affections were equal to the tenderest regard of the tenderest parents. Nor were my affections lost; he loved me in return with all the ardour of a son. There he lies, and all my worldly happiness lies dead with him. But if the turning of a straw would call him back to life, I would not for ten thousand worlds be the turner of that straw in opposition to the will of God."

Soul-growth aided by silence. Some of the best and most beautiful works are perfected in silence. In the making of plate-glass the process of pouring the melted material is so delicate, requiring such care and steadiness, that the men, impressed with the great danger of carelessness, usually preserve silence during the process.

Humility a help to knowledge. When the recent military expedition went to Lower Egypt, it was found that only the smallest boats could go great distances up the Nile. There are some truths that are only revealed to those who grow in loneliness and self-forgetfulness—secret teachings which are reserved for those who are intensely childlike in spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Heroic endurance. One of the secrets of Victor Hugo's power over the French people was their memory of the following. When the disasters of the Franco-German war were falling thickly, and the iron band was closing round Paris, word came that Victor Hugo was coming to the city. He came at the very moment that the investment was complete, with the last train, the last breath of free air. On the way he had

seen the Bavarians, seen villages burned with petroleum, and he came to imprison himself in Paris. A memorable ovation was given him by the people, and they never forgot his voluntary sharing of their sufferings.

HOMILETICS.

The Tenderness of God.

(Vers. 31–33.)

I. Seen in the limitation of punishment. "For the Lord will not cast off for ever" (ver. 31). God has no delight in inflicting punishment. His righteousness imposes on Him the necessity of punishing sin. But punishment has its limits; and when those limits are exceeded, justice degenerates into cruelty. The tenderness of God is a universal safeguard against unduly prolonged punishment (Ps. lxxvii. 7–9).

II. Seen in the abundant manifestation of mercy. "But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies" (ver. 32). Even in chastisement mercy triumphs over justice. Mercy provides a means of escape, not from justice, but from the worst consequences of transgression. "All the souls that were, were forfeit once; and He that might the vantage best have took found out the remedy." "God be *merciful* to me a sinner," is the leading idea of inscriptions on thousands of gravestones in the stately cathedral and the village churchyard, and bear silent testimony to the deepest convictions of mankind. The mercy of God will be conspicuous to the universe, and the theme of endless adoration.

III. Seen in the reluctance with which He inflicts chastisement. "For He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men" (ver. 33). God never afflicts willingly—lit., *from his heart*. The heart of God is love, and love has no pleasure in the sufferings of others, and is not eager to impose suffering. That God afflicts at all, and that He does it with so much reluctance, should intensify the conviction that, not only is chastisement necessary, but that it is evidently intended to lead to a greater good. The prophet dwells on the tenderness of God to enforce complete resignation to the Divine arrangements.

Lessons.—1. *God never punishes beyond the absolute necessity of the case.* 2. *He sympathises with the sufferer His justice compels Him to chastise.* 3. *He is ever slow to wrath.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 31–36. **Comfort for the sorrowful.** I. *A cheering assurance given.* 1. That God's abandonment of His people is only temporary. "For the Lord will not cast off for ever." 2. That the favour with which He will visit them will be signal and abundant. "But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies." II. *An important reason adduced.* "For He doth not afflict willingly." This may be inferred: 1. From His character. He is a God of love. 2. From the relationship He sustains to His people. He is their father. An earthly parent has to chastise his offspring, but He does it with reluctance. 3. Their sufferings are attended with many alleviations. Had He any pleasure in punishing us, so much mercy would not be mingled with judgment. 4. The object He has in view in afflicting His children: it is for their profit, that they may be partakers of His holiness. 5. His readiness to remove His chastening hand when the visitation has answered the end intended. III. *A gracious*

limitation subjoined. Whenever God afflicts, it is: 1. Within the bounds of moderation. To "crush" expresses what is extreme and destructive (Isa. xxvii. 8; Jer. x. 24, xlvi. 28). 2. Never in violation of the principles of equity. "To subvert a man in his cause the Lord approveth not." He is the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness, and all He doeth is in accordance therewith.—*Expository Outlines.*

Vers. 31–33. **Afflictions not accidental.** This apparent contradiction between the Divine compassion and our human griefs, between what we desire and need and what we feel to be real, is to-day what it has been from the beginning, the standing problem, the bitter tragedy of human life. It has but one solution. There is a mischief in man's nature producing discord in his condition, begetting the necessity and the mercy of a Divine chastening; and this, both in the end it contemplates and in the methods it employs, is a providence of compassion. I. *The fact that grief is the heritage of man.* Life is still the natural history of sorrow—man's life the bitterest of all. There are troubles that belong to the lot of individual man, and in this form they are the impartial inheritance of the race. There are troubles which afflict the community, which fall upon the mass in its aggregation of families, neighbourhoods, communities, and nations. The great and good, the beautiful and the wise, the aged and the young, all races and all conditions of men, have gone down under this terrible Euroclydon of grief. These facts are a difficulty to the Christian philosopher, but they are equally so to the sceptic. II. *Divine compassion in its relation to suffering.* 1. All human suffering comes within the foreknowledge and is under the control of God. 2. Many of our troubles, probably most of them, have their causes in ourselves. 3. There are troubles and afflictions, and these not few, which we must consider only as the punishment of sin. Strife is the essence of sin. It is self-will pitted in avowed antagonism to God. God will not vacate His sovereignty because man rebels. He cannot be defeated or bribed, or bought off from His purpose, even by prayer. The bitter, bitter cup must be drunk; the chastisement must come. But with all this, there comes also the presence of an infinite compassion. He succours His children while the law oppresses them. He delivers them speedily when its mission is accomplished.—*J. Burton.*

Vers. 32, 33. **God the consolation of the afflicted.** I. *A revealed fact.* "God doth not willingly afflict the children of men." This fact rests upon another fact—the teaching of Scripture regarding the providence of God. A particular and special providence is the sole ground of prayer; prayer being the basis of all true religion. When the mind dwells upon the special providence of God, it learns the more difficult task of submitting to all afflictive dispensations with thanksgiving. II. *The passage appears to stand opposed to the omnipotence of God.* God is Almighty, but He has willed to set limits to the exercise of His omnipotence. He abides by the laws He has himself enacted. The law connects life and happiness with obedience. But the law would cease to exist if life and happiness were dispensed also to the disobedient. The law was magnified when God Himself, in the person of His Son, yielded obedience to it. God will not by His omnipotence overrule or supersede the freedom of the human will. If we be not true to ourselves, He will at length, after trial, leave us to our own devices. It is an awful thought that a man may outlive the day of grace. He may remain a *thing* upon earth to subserve some purpose in the providence of God, but as a *person* his trial may have ceased. If one of the purposes of affliction is to correct and amend us, one of the means of avoiding affliction must be to endeavour to shape our lives according to the law of God. When afflictions do come, it is an ineffable consolation to be assured all things are ordered by God for our good. III. *The histories of good men illustrate the truth of the text.* We learn why afflictions were imposed upon them. Study the lives

of Jacob, Joseph, David, Job, and Christ.—*W. F. Hook, D.D.*

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Chastisement a proof of God's tenderness.** It is true to be struck once in anger is fearful. God's displeasure is more than His blow. Fear not; these stripes are the tokens of His love. He is no son that is not beaten, yea, till he smart and cry, if not till he bleed. No parent corrects another's child; and he is no good parent that corrects not his own. O rod worthy to be kissed, that assures us of His love, of our adoption!—*Bp. Hall.*

"Heaven is not always angry when He strikes,
But most chastises those whom most He likes."—*Pomfret.*

Affliction God's messenger. Luther used to say there were many of the Psalms he could never understand till he had been afflicted. Rutherford declared he had got a new Bible through the furnace. Hard weather tries what health we have; afflictions try what sap we have, what grace we have. Withered leaves soon fall off in windy weather; rotten boughs quickly break with heavy weights.

Afflictions overruled. Artists and composers have often been helped in their studies by their physical infirmities. Bach's blindness, Beethoven's deafness, making society and social distractions almost impossible, drove them in upon their own genius, and compelled them to listen to the voice of God within them. Some beauties of character and achievement can only be secured by retirement and solitude, and affliction often compels to this.

HOMILETICS.

GOD AND HUMAN WRONG.

(Vers. 34–36.)

I. God approves not wanton cruelty towards prisoners of war. "To crush under His feet all the prisoners of the earth" (ver. 34). Jeremiah was probably a daily witness of cruelties suffered by the captives. One of the greatest horrors of ancient warfare was the inhuman treatment of prisoners. Any exception to this, history does not fail to record as a remarkable example of clemency and forbearance. Few men can be trusted with unrestricted power. Where there is no fear of immediate consequences to himself, man rapidly develops into a monster of cruelty. The helplessness of captives appeals to the pity of the tyrant. Every act of inhumanity God not only disapproves, but will certainly punish.

II. God approves not the base attempt to procure an unjust sentence before any legal tribunal. "To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High" (ver. 35), of a superior, or before a legal tribunal acting in the name of God (Exod. xxi. 6; xxii. 8, 9). An oppressor who would hesitate to commit an act of cruelty in public does not scruple to stoop to the basest arts in secret to pervert the course of justice. Happy is the nation where the judgment-seat is beyond the reach of corruption.

III. God approves not the perversion of justice in any case, or in any degree. "To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not" (ver. 36). No act of wrong, whether open or secret, can escape the All-seeing Jehovah, nor can it escape punishment. Tyranny is not supreme, and its reign is always short-lived. God is the implacable foe of all injustice; and the oppressed everywhere are sure to be relieved and vindicated.

LESSONS.—1. *Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.* 2. *God is not an indifferent spectator of the wrong inflicted by one man upon another.* 3. *God will certainly interfere to redress all human wrongs.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 34–36. The Divine character. 1. Gives dignity and significance to every legal tribunal. 2. Is a perpetual protest against every act of cruelty and injustice. 3. Is a guarantee that justice will be ultimately triumphant.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**The beginning of wrong.** An old writer says, "A man who goes to law finds the court full of invisible hooks. First his cloak, then the skirts of his coat, then his sleeves, till everything is torn from him, and, like a gypsy, he escapes because there is no further hold upon him." The youth who crosses the threshold of the court of vice will find those invisible hooks sharper and in greater abundance than in courts of law. Once caught, he will be hooked in every direction. One tempter will succeed another, each handing him over to the next. Thus snared and dragged from vice to vice, until denuded of every virtue, he will at last, in all probability, perish in unutterable woe.—*Dr. Wise.*

Justice expedited. Juvenalis, a widow, complained to Theodoric, king of the Romans, that a suit of hers had been in court three years. The king being informed who were her judges, gave orders that they should give all expedition to the poor woman's cause, and in two days it was decided to her satisfaction. Theodoric then summoned the judges before him, and inquired how it was that they had done in two days what they had delayed for three years. "When I put you in office," said the king, "did I not consign all pleas and proceedings to you? You deserve death for having delayed that justice for three years which two days could accomplish." He commanded them to be beheaded.

Injustice and anger. There is an anger that is damnable: it is the anger of selfishness. There is an anger that is majestic as the frown of Jehovah's brow: it is the anger of truth and love. If man meets with injustice, it is not required that he shall not be roused to meet it; but if he is angry after he has had time to think upon it, that is sinful. The flame is not wrong, but the coals are.—*Beecher.*

Suffering preferred to injustice. While Athens was ruled by the thirty tyrants, Socrates was summoned to the senate-house and ordered to go with some other persons to seize one Leon, a man of rank and fortune, whom they determined to put out of the way that they might enjoy his estate. The commission Socrates flatly refused, and, not satisfied therewith, added also his reasons for such refusal. "I will never willingly," said he, "assist in an unjust act." Cherides sharply replied, "Dost thou think, Socrates, to talk always in this style and not to suffer?" "Far from it," added he, "I expect to suffer a thousand ills, but none so great as to do unjustly."

HOMILETICS.

THE DIVINE RULE ABSOLUTE AND UNIVERSAL.

(Vers. 37–39.)

I. That nothing happens without the Divine knowledge and sanction. "Who is he that saith and it cometh to pass when the Lord commandeth it not?" (ver. 37). The curse causeless does not come. Somehow, somewhere, and for some purpose, there is running all through the seething mass of what appears to us little else than a complex of sorrowful accidents, the activity of a prescient foreknowledge, a permissive providence, a governing will. "We see only results. To God, the beginning, with its antecedents all hidden and remote, is a presence. The wildest freaks of chance, as they seem, the most exorbitant anomalies in

nature, the slightest incidents in the constitution of mind or matter, storm, earthquake and fires, the shoot of an avalanche, the dropping of a leaf, the wanderings of a comet, the birth, life, history, and death of a man, all come within the foreknowledge and are beneath the sovereign sweep of the purposes of God."

II. **That the mingling of adversity and prosperity is in harmony with the administration of infinite wisdom.** "Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?" (ver. 38). If the life of man was an uninterrupted series of calamities, we might gravely question the wisdom and goodness of the Great Ruler; but the evil and the good are so nicely balanced one over against the other, that when God has finished His work there shall be no just ground for complaint (Eccles. vii. 14). The old divines used to say, "God is too wise to err, too good to be unkind."

III. **That, while life is continued, man should not murmur over his punishment, but repent of the sins which made that punishment necessary.** "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" (ver. 39). The word *living* is emphatic, and implies that while God spares man's life he has no room to murmur. Life is a boon that transcends in significance any amount of temporary suffering. Life is a grand opportunity for repentance, reform, and the accomplishment of noblest purposes. Every moment in life spent in complaining is worse than wasted. When we understand how completely the Divine mind is governing everything, we begin to grasp the true significance of life.

LESSONS.—1. *The government of the world is in the hands of a wise and loving God.* 2. *Affliction when used aright may be an unspeakable blessing.* 3. *Life is a gift fraught with great moral issues.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 39. **Complaint under affliction.** I. *Some complaints allowable.* 1. It is lawful to express what we feel and suffer in those ways Nature prompts us. 2. May complain to friends, relations, and acquaintances. 3. To God as well as to men. II. *Complaints prompted by impatience with God's dealings condemned.* 1. It is long before God takes the rod in hand to correct. 2. He is soon prevailed with to lay it aside. 3. He lays no more on us than our sins deserve. 4. We enjoy many mercies in the meantime by which the bitterness of affliction is allayed. 5. God has a sovereignty of power and dominion to deal with us as He pleaseth. III. *Complaints may be silenced:* 1. By keeping alive in your heart a sense of God's love in every dispensation. 2. By labouring to have a fresh remembrance of your sins. 3. By considering the extreme danger of quarrelling with and opposing God.—*Conant.*

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Spiritual insight into the Divine rule.** There seems to be in religious men a prophetic faculty of insight into the true bearings of outward things—an insight which puts to shame the sagacity of statesmen, and claims for the sons of God, and only for them, the wisdom even of the world. Those only read the world's future truly who have faith in principle as opposed to faith in human dexterity; who feel that in human things there lies truly and really a spiritual nature, a spiritual connection, a spiritual tendency, which the wisdom of the serpent cannot alter and scarcely can affect.—*Froude.*

Submission to God's will. Stonewall Jackson was once asked, "Suppose, in addition to blindness, you were condemned to be bedridden and racked with pain for life; you would hardly call yourself happy then?" He paused, and said with great deliberateness, "Yes, I think I could. My faith in the Almighty wisdom is absolute, and

why should this accident change it?" Touching him upon a tender point—his impatience of anything bordering on dependence—the test was pushed further. "If, in addition to blindness and incurable infirmity and pain, you had to receive grudging charity from those on whom you had no claim, what then?" There was a strange reverence in his lifted eye, and an exalted expression over his whole face, as he replied with slow deliberateness, "If it was God's will, I think I could lie there content a hundred years!"

Evil overruled. Henry the Eighth's divorce of Queen Catherine, and the refusal of the Pope to sanction it, led indirectly to the English Reformation and to the flinging off of the Papal temporal ecclesiastical power.

A life well lived. Tyndale's work was done. He lived to see the Bible no longer carried by stealth into his country, where the possession of it was a crime, but borne in by the solemn will of the king—solemnly recognised as the Word of the Most High God. And then his occupation in this earth was gone. His eyes saw the salvation for which he had longed, and he might depart to his place. He was denounced to the Regent of Flanders; he was enticed by the suborned treachery of a miserable English fanatic beyond the town under whose liberties he had been secured; and, with the reward which has been held fitting by human justice for the earth's great ones, he passed away in smoke and flame to his rest. —*Froude.*

HOMILETICS.

REPENTANCE.

(Vers. 40–42.)

I. **Begins in strict self-examination.** "Let us search and try our ways" (ver. 40). The discovery of ourselves is the discovery of sin. We never know how sinful we are till we thoroughly investigate our own hearts. The more we search, the more we see, and the conviction of our sin becomes an intolerable reality.

II. **Involves a turning to God.** "And turn again to the Lord" (ver. 40). The preposition is forcible, implying "Let us go back; not half way, but the whole." A repentance that spends itself in emotions and tears is ineffective. Sorrow for sin is but a symptom of repentance. Genuine repentance prompts to immediate and active moral reformation. Sin drives us from God: repentance brings us back to Him.

III. **Is accompanied with earnest prayer.** "Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens" (ver. 41). In real prayer the outward form is the expression of the feeling of the heart. The heart lifts up the hands, and then with them rises in prayer to God. Deep emotion will find its own way of expression. Repentance reveals the need of help and forgiveness, and prayer is the expression of that need.

IV. **Includes confession of sin.** "We have transgressed and have rebelled" (ver. 42). The spell of hardness with which the soul was bound is broken when it is brought to the point of full and free confession of sin. There is often much humbling to be done before this point is reached. Confession of sin is an important proof of the genuineness of repentance, especially when attended with the other signs referred to.

V. **Must be genuine and complete to secure forgiveness.** "Thou hast not pardoned" (ver. 42). Why? Not because God is not merciful; not because He is unwilling to forgive; not because the opportunity is inappropriate: but because there is a lack of reality and sincerity in the penitent. The prescription of repentance is a revelation of forgiveness. God does not mock the sinner by

urging to repentance and then withholding forgiveness. If there is no eagerness for forgiveness, it is because there is something radically defective in the repentance.

LESSONS.—1. *Suffering should lead to reflection.* 2. *No amount of repentance can merit forgiveness.* 3. *God pardons only the penitent, not because of their penitence, but for His mercy's sake.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 40. The duty of self-reflection. I. *Its usefulness.* 1. Teaches us to know ourselves. 2. We discover our sins. 3. Provides good company and comfortable employment. II. *Its neglect mischievous.* 1. Hardens the heart. 2. A daily increase of sin. 3. Renders a man the more unwilling to reckon with himself. III. *Demands diligence.* 1. There is a natural reluctance to attend to the duty. 2. Many sins not easily discovered, unless diligent search is made. 3. A convenient time should be set apart for the work. 4. Affliction a time for heart-searching. 5. Let not the difficulty of the work discourage you. 6. A work that must be often repeated. IV. *Leads to repentance.* "Turn again to the Lord." Sin is an aversion and turning away from God; repentance is a returning to Him. 1. Repentance must be speedy. 2. Thorough. 3. Resolute and steadfast.—*Conant.*

Ver. 41. **The sublimity of devotion.** The finest and most sublime sensations of which the soul is susceptible are connected with the principle of devotion. I. *The sublimest books existing are those from which we learn our faith.* The writings of the inspired penmen abound with passages for which no parallel can be found in the productions of mere genius. Rousseau once exclaimed, "The majesty of the Scriptures fills me with astonishment; the holiness of the Gospel speaks to my very heart. Behold the books of the philosophers, with all their pomp, how little are they in comparison! Is it possible that a book at once so wise and so sublime should have been the production of mere men?" II. *Some of the situations of real life prove the intimate connection between devotion and the sources of sublime feeling.* 1. In studying the character of God and the works of Nature. 2. In the changing circumstances of life, in adversity or prosperity, the proper operation of religious thought is to call up sublime and fervent feelings. III. *Consider the subject of adoration—God, whether worshipped in private or in public.* If it be objected that in such an account of the effects of devout feeling, we place religion too much under the dominion of the imagination, it may be answered that though the abuse of a thing is dangerous, we are not therefore to relinquish its use. It is the soul that truly feels; imagination is the effort of the soul to rise above mortality. Imagination as well as reason is frequently appealed to in Scripture.—*Nares.*

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Repentance and confession.**

Father, I scarcely dare to pray,
So clear I see, now it is done,
That I have wasted half my day,
And left my work but just begun:

So clear I see that things I thought
Were right or harmless were a sin;
So clear I see that I have sought,
Unconscious, selfish aims to win:

So clear I see that I have hurt
The souls I might have helped to save;
That I have slothful been, inert,
Deaf to the calls Thy leaders gave.

In outskirts of Thy kingdom vast,
Father, the humblest spot give me
Set me the lowliest task Thou hast,
Let me, repentant, work for Thee.

Repentance and forgiveness. No repentance is acceptable with God, but what is built or leans on the faith of forgiveness. We have a cloud of witnesses to this truth in the Scripture. Many there have been, many are recorded, who have been convinced of sin, perplexed about it, sorry for it,

who have made open confession and acknowledgment of it, who, under the present sense of it, have cried out even to God for deliverance, and have yet come short of mercy, pardon, and acceptance with God. The cases of Cain, Pharaoh, Saul, Ahab, Judas, and others might be insisted upon.—*John Owen.*

Death-bed repentance. The English proverb says, "The river past and God forgotten," to express with how mournful a frequency He whose assistance was invoked—it may have been earnestly—in the moment of peril, is remembered no more, so soon as by His help the danger has been surmounted. And the Italian form of it sounds a still greater depth of ingratitude: "The peril past, the saint mocked"—the vows made to him in peril remaining unperformed in safety.—*Trench.*

— There is *one* case of death-bed repentance recorded, that no one should despair, and *only* one, that none should presume.—*Augustine.*

Repentance must be sincere. Lorenzo de' Medici lies dying in the city of Florence; in the terrors of death he has sent for the one man who had never yielded to his threats or caresses—the brave Savonarola. Lorenzo confesses that he has heavy on his soul three crimes—the cruel sack of Volterra, the theft of the public dower of young girls, by which many were driven to a wicked life, and the blood shed after the conspiracy of Pazzi. He is greatly agitated, and Savonarola, to keep him quiet, keeps repeating, "God is merciful," "God is good." "But," he added, "there is need of three things." "And what are they, father?" "First, you must have a great and living faith in the mercy of God." "This I have, the greatest." "Second, you must restore that which you have wrongfully taken, or require your children to restore it for you." Lorenzo looks surprised and troubled; but he forces himself to compliance, and nods his head in sign of assent. Then Savonarola rises to his feet, and stands over the dying prince. "Last, you must give back their liberties to the people of Florence." Lorenzo, summoning up all his remaining strength, disdainfully turns his back, and, without uttering another word, Savonarola departs without giving him absolution.

HOMILETICS.

The Tension of Prolonged Suffering.

(Verses 43–47.)

I. Fosters exaggerated views of God's unpitying anger. "Thou hast covered with anger and persecuted us; Thou hast slain, Thou hast not pitied" (ver. 43). The people had acknowledged their sin and repented; but no relief came. Not only were they not pardoned, but it seemed as if the Divine wrath was more relentless than ever. The Chaldeans are still wrecking the holy city, and the citizens are being ignominiously dragged into captivity. The cloud of the Divine anger, instead of vanishing, thickens into darker threatenings of vengeance. This is one of the unvarying phases of continued suffering—every affliction is magnified into disproportionate dimensions.

II. Induces the hasty conclusion that prayer is useless. "Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through" (ver. 44). A deity so densely veiled is unapproachable. The veil is a cloud of wrath, and the suffering suppliant is stricken with terror and dismay. Prayer can never pierce so dense a cloud, and it is useless to try. The tension of prolonged suffering is apt to shake one's confidence in the utility of prayer, and suggest the doubt whether God is after all a prayer-hearing God. It is a great calamity when the soul restrains prayer.

III. Creates the impression that the sufferer is utterly despised and scorned. "Thou hast made us as the off-scouring and refuse in the midst of the

people. All our enemies have opened their mouths against us" (vers. 45, 46). There is nothing so depressing as suffering, and the sufferer is often the prey of self-depreciation and false imaginings, haunted with the idea that he is the sport and laughing-stock of others. It is the effect of sin to lower us in our own estimation, and it is a part of its punishment that we sink in the estimation of others.

IV. **Intensifies the feeling of hopeless ruin.** "Fear and a snare is come upon us, desolation and destruction" (ver. 47). The light of hope, that flickered for a moment (ver. 21), is extinguished, and the sufferer relapses into dull, dead hopelessness (ver. 11). The enemy has completely hemmed in the city with his forces; his grip tightens, strategy and bravery succeed, the city falls, and is abandoned to riot and destruction. The protection of Jehovah is withdrawn, and, what is the most disheartening revelation of all, He now appears as an angry foe. Hope perishes when we discover that God is against us.

LESSONS.—1. *Excessive suffering is apt to impair the moral vision.* 2. *It is a calamity to lose faith in prayer when we most need its solace.* 3. *The outlook is not always so desperate as it appears to the despondent sufferer.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 43–47. **The pitilessness of the Divine anger:** I. As it appears to the abject sufferer (ver. 47). II. Seen in its relentless persecution (ver. 43). III. In its apparent indifference to human entreaty (ver. 44). IV. In abandoning its victims to the contempt and derision of others (vers. 45, 46).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Anger restrained more terrible.** Writing upon the symbolical carvings of the ducal palace at Venice, Mr. Ruskin remarks that there is a figure of Anger represented by a woman tearing open her dress at her breast. Giotto represents this vice under the same symbol, but it is the weakest of all the figures in the Arena Chapel. The Wrath of Spencer rides upon a lion, brandishing a firebrand, his garments stained with blood. Rage, or Furor, occurs subordinately in other places. It occurs to me very strange that neither Giotto nor Spencer should have given any representation of the *restrained anger* which is infinitely the most terrible; both of them make him violent. God's forbearance of sin is restrained anger—not therefore less, but more terrible. The future retribution is not less, but more awful, since it is the wrath of the Lamb. Anger now restrained will be direr when once revealed. Long-suffering is a sign of suppressed indignation.

Perverted views of suffering. That extraordinary sufferings indicated extraordinary sins was contradicted by the Book of Job. So also consistent Pharisaism saw in the lowliness of Jesus His unworthiness, in His defencelessness His guilt, and after having crucified Him, in His cross His curse; whilst Jesus recognises therein His own glorification and the salvation of the world. The clouds that are the precursors of a storm do not appear so black to us when they hang immediately over our heads as when we see them rising up at the edge of the horizon. It is easier to know the worst than to dread the worst. All misfortunes appear more formidable at a distance than when we actually come to grapple with them.

Unjustifiable depression. In a fit of dejection Dean Hook once wrote—"My life has been a failure. I have done many things tolerably, but nothing well. As a parish priest, as a preacher, and now as a writer, I am quite aware that I have failed, and the more so because my friends contradict the assertion."

God does hear prayer. There is no such thing in the long history of God's kingdom as an unanswered prayer. Every true desire from a child's heart finds some true answer in the heart of God. Most certain it is that the prayer of the Church of God since creation has

not been the cry of orphans in an empty home without a Father to hear or answer. Jesus Christ did not pray in vain or to an unknown God, nor has He spoken in ignorance of God or of His brethren when He says, "Ask and receive, that your joy may be full."—*Norman Macleod.*

HOMILETICS.

A Sympathetic Nature.

(Verses 48–51.)

I. Is pained by the evidences of national distress everywhere visible. "Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city" (ver. 51). What I see I feel. I see nothing but misery, and I feel nothing but pain. Amid the general suffering, the tender heart of the prophet mourned over the cruel fate of the Jewish maidens. This is a subject to which he often refers (ch. i. 4, 18; ii. 10, 21; v. 11). "Jeremiah suffered not in his own person, being under the protection of the Divine Being; but though he dwelt securely from the hand of mortality, yet he was filled with the bowels of sympathy. Though he wrote of the Jews' desolations, yet he named them Jeremiah's Lamentations."

II. Is aggravated in its grief because God, who sees the calamity, does not at once remove it. "Till the Lord look down and behold from heaven" (ver. 50). *While* the Lord looks down. He sees all this suffering; every feature of it is fully known to Him. Why does He not interfere? How can He be so indifferent to the agonies of His people? The prophet's heart is breaking, and it is a mystery and an addition to his pain that Jehovah does not haste to the rescue. Sympathy is not always wise. Our emotions are apt to swamp our judgment. God knows infallibly how much suffering is necessary, and when the right moment is come for Him to interpose.

III. Expresses its sorrow in a copious outflow of tears. "Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water, without any intermission" (vers. 48, 49). The measure of our being is our capacity for sorrow or joy. A certain traveller states that the shadow cast by Mount Hermon at some periods is as much as seventy miles long. A sensitive nature is susceptible of great sorrow, and has manifold ways of expressing the same. While the cause of sorrow remains, the sympathetic heart will mourn.

Lessons.—1. *Callous indeed is the heart that can witness suffering without emotion.* 2. *The heart that loves intensely suffers intensely.* 3. *A sympathetic nature finds a merciful relief in tears.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 51. Sin the cause of suffering: I. To the patriot, as he sees its effect upon the nation. II. To the philanthropist, as he observes the mischief it works in the world. III. To the individual believer, as he is conscious of its presence in his own heart.

Illustrations.—**The power of sympathy.** Happy is the man who has that in his soul which acts upon the dejected as April airs upon violet roots. Gifts from the hand are silver and gold; but the heart gives that which neither silver nor gold can buy. To be full of goodness, full of cheerfulness, full of sympathy, full of helpful hope, causes a man to carry blessings of which he is himself as unconscious as a lamp of its own shining. Such an one moves on human life as stars move on dark seas to bewildered mariners; as the sun wheels, bringing all the seasons with him from the south.—*Beecher.*

Grief leaves its mark. Sir Walter Scott says of himself after a sore bereavement, "I was broken-hearted for two years; and though handsomely pieced again, the crack will remain to my dying day."

Practical sympathy. When St. Remy was preaching before King Clovis of France, telling with passionate pathos the story of Christ's suffering and death, the monarch suddenly sprang from his throne, and, grasping his spear, cried, "Had I been there with my brave Franks, I would have avenged His wrongs."

The relief of tears. A maniac while listening to a thrilling recital was moved to tears. Lifting her withered finger she exclaimed, "Do you see that tear? It is the first tear that I have shed for seven years, and it will relieve my poor burning head. I have often wished that I could weep, but I could not."

HOMILETICS.

A Faithful Prophet in Trouble.

(Verses 52–58.)

I. Cruelly treated by his enemies. "Mine enemies chased me sore like a bird, without cause: I am cut off" (vers. 52–54). In these verses, and to the end of the chapter, Jeremiah deals with his own personal afflictions. Without the least provocation, he was treated with the most malignant enmity. He was harassed, as a bird is tired out, and at length run down by continuous pursuit. He is overwhelmed with trouble, and is as one imprisoned in a dungeon, shut off from the current of active life. He acknowledged the righteousness of the Divine dealings, but he was keenly alive to the unrighteousness and undeserved cruelty of his persecutors. Had he been the aggressor, he might have expected retaliation, but he was oppressed without cause. His enemies were actuated by sheer hatred. His only fault was his faithfulness to God and to his own conscience. Simple goodness often rouses the wanton animosity of the wicked.

II. Seeks refuge in prayer. "I called upon Thy name, O Lord; hide not Thine ear at my cry" (vers. 55, 56). It is a relief to turn from the cruelty of man to the compassion and power of God. The soul is never so helpless but that it can pray. When we can do nothing else, we can pray. Prayer is the language of need, and we are comforted with the assurance that God will hear, and not only hear but help. It seemed at one time that prayer was useless (ver. 44); but better thoughts prevailed, and the soul discovered that the cry for help was not in vain. "Prayer is the breath of the new man, sucking in the air of mercy in petitions and returning it in praises; it is both the evidence and the maintenance of the spiritual life."

III. Rescued by Divine aid. "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee; Thou saidst, Fear not. O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; Thou has redeemed my life" (vers. 57, 58). When we draw near to God in prayer, He draws near to us. Our troubles are overwhelming when God is absent and we are left to ourselves. With His manifested presence our troubles vanish, and we are inspired with strength to endure and to triumph.

Lessons.—1. *Fidelity makes many enemies.* 2. *The nation that ill-uses its best men courts its own ruin.* 3. *The Lord is ever on the side of the faithful.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 54–57. The efficacy of prayer. I. These words show to what a state God's most favoured servants may be reduced—extreme suffering, tears, despondency. II. The remedy open to them. Prayer expressed in cries, groans, breathings, sighs. III. The efficacy of that remedy whenever it is

applied. "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee; Thou saidst, Fear not." In these words we hear the consolatory voice of God. Marvellous condescension; certainty of help and deliverance.—*Simeon.*

Ver. 57. **A wonder explained by greater wonders.** I. *An explanation of this wonder.* God doth draw near to men. 1. Men have ever been in the thoughts of God. 2. God came tenderly near in nature. 3. The Lord Jesus was specially near in the days of His life on earth. 4. He came still nearer to us in His death. 5. In heaven He is perpetually near us. 6. Jesus may well come near to His people, for there is a mystical union which ensures it. II. *Consider the wonder itself.* 1. By no means is this wonder at all contrary to expectation. 2. God draws near by strengthening us to bear up under pressure. 3. By vouchsafing a doubly vivid sense of His love. 4. By granting a sensible assurance of His sympathy. 5. By speedy and remarkable deliverance out of trouble. 6. The text indicates surprise concerning the memorable graciousness of God. 7. The promptness of God. 8. The extreme tenderness of God.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

Ver. 58. **God pleading for saints and saints pleading for God.** I. *The Divine pleading.* 1. The Lord pleads our cause in the court of Providence by silencing enemies and by raising up friends for His people. 2. He pleads for them in the court of Divine law. 3. In the court of conscience. 4. In the court of heaven. 5. And at the last great day of judgment. II. *If the Lord hath pleaded the causes of our soul, we should plead His cause while we have breath to pray.* 1. This is the life-work of the Christian. 2. Should be done in witnessing for Christ by our consistency of conduct. 3. We can all plead for Christ in a private way. Be it mine to weep for the sins of the time and prophesy against them. Be it yours in your own private walk and conversation to rebuke private sin, and by your loving earnestness to make Jesus Christ dear to many souls!—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Faithfulness in service.** If you and I show that we attach importance to the solemn performance of even the slightest duty connected with our dear Master's service; that we consider even the office of doorkeeper in His house an office of honour; that, convinced of His presence, we are as devout in offering the prayers when only two or three are present as when there are two or three hundred—we shall find His blessing attending us, and we shall be the means of converting others.—*Dean Hook.*

— A carpenter was once asked, Why he troubled to finish off a certain magistrate's bench so carefully? His reply was, "I can't do otherwise; besides, I may have to sit on it one of these days."

Faithful to death. When Commodore Joseph Smith saw by the first despatch that reached Washington from Fortress Monroe that the *Congress*, on which his son was commander, had shown the white flag, he said, "Then Joe's dead." It was so.

Prayer an ever-open refuge. St. Cuthbert was once in a snowstorm that drove his boat on the coast of Fife. "The snowstorm closes the road along the shore," mourned his comrades; "the storm bars our way over the sea." "There is still the way of heaven; that lies open," said the devoted saint.

Divine aid works a marvellous change. Probably there is nowhere on the globe so marked a climatic boundary as that of the Cascade Mountains in both Washington Territory and Oregon. West of this boundary the winters are mild and the summers cool and showery; east of it the winters are sharp and dry and the summers very hot. On one side are gigantic firs and cedars, while on the other all are of poor size and condition. Even the flowers are of new species, and all the atmospheric conditions are changed. The line that lies between the unsaved and the saved, once crossed, what changes are manifest! "If any man be in Jesus Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; lo, all things have become new."

HOMILETICS.

A CONFIDENT APPEAL TO DIVINE JUSTICE.

(Verses 59–66.)

I. **That Jehovah recognises the wrongs suffered by His servants.** "O Lord, Thou has seen my wrong; judge Thou my cause" (ver. 59). It seemed at times as if the chosen people were forgotten and left to the mercy of their oppressors. Years passed away, and still there was no prospect of rescue. The valiant stand made by the prophet involved him in great and unjust suffering, and it seemed as if Heaven was indifferent to the issue. But things are not what they seem. All the time the eye of Jehovah was watching the struggle and noting every act of injustice and wrong. Every pang of suffering is faithfully registered. When the soul is conscious that Jehovah is cognisant of its distress, it is nerved with courage and patiently waits God's time of deliverance.

II. **That Jehovah infallibly observes the cruel plottings and malicious reproaches of His people's enemies.** "Thou hast seen all their vengeance. Thou hast heard their reproach, O Lord, and all their imaginations against me," &c. (vers. 60–63). Not a single movement, not a word of scorn of His enemies escapes the eye and the ear of Jehovah. How vain and foolish their opposition appears to Him! Their cleverest combinations are but the work of helpless imbeciles; their wildest rage is but a momentary flash of aimless malignity. In a moment their schemes are shattered and their revilings for ever silenced. God is so strong in conscious righteousness that He can afford to bide His time. If is a mistake to regard His long-suffering patience as a sign of apathy.

III. **That Jehovah will vindicate the wrongs of His servants by punishing their oppressors.** "Render unto them a recompense, O Lord, according to the work of their hands," &c. (vers. 64–66). The imprecatory form of these words are uttered by Jeremiah in his prophetical character. He calls for the vengeance upon his enemies which their iniquities have deserved, and which Divine Justice is certain to render. The versions and the Targum all render these verses not as imperatives, but as futures—*Thou shalt render unto them a recompense, &c.* It is an unalterable principle of the Divine government to punish all evil-doers. The sufferings they have inflicted on others shall be meted out to them with swift and terrible retribution. "Under the heavens of the Lord" there is no place of escape for the workers of iniquity. The wrongs of God's servants shall be redressed, and His honour and justice universally vindicated.

LESSONS.—1. *The Divine patience with evil-doers must not be construed as meaning indifference.* 2 *It is an aggravation of suffering when we know it is unjust.* 3. *Vengeance against all workers of iniquity may be safely left in the hands of God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 59–63. **The Divine slowness to punish.** I. *Does not arise from indifference to human wrongs.* "Thou has seen my wrong" (ver. 59). II. *Is not from want of knowledge of all the actions of the wicked* (vers. 60–63). III. *Indicates that God is so strong and man is so weak.* IV. *Affords every opportunity for the exercise of mercy to the truly penitent.*

Ver. 63. **A godly life the music of society.** I. *Like music, a godly life is harmonious.* 1. It is in harmony with God. A pure manhood is in harmony with all that is Godlike in thought and sentiment, and with all that is Christly in character and work. It is in harmony with the works of God, with all that is beautiful in nature. It is in harmony with the providence of God, with all that is happy or sad in the discipline of life; and supremely it is in harmony with the inspired truth of God as revealed in history, character, and precept. 2. It is in harmony with itself. All the truer sympathies of a

devout heart, all the higher faculties of a pure mind exist in a condition of self-harmony. Living in communion with the Supreme Being, the good man obtains true concord in the exercise of prayer. And thus attuned by devotion, every power of his soul joins in the hymn of life. 3. It is in harmony with the highest good of the race. A godly man is ever the foremost to aid any philanthropic enterprise for the real welfare of others. All the strongest impulses of his nature prompt him to sympathetic action for the unfortunate. Consequently his time, money, and influence are made subservient to the common good of men. II. *Like music, a godly life is cheering.* When we have been oppressed with care, when the great mystery of life has come heavily upon our souls, what hope and comfort have been imparted by contact with a happy, pious spirit. III. *Like music, a godly life is inspiring.* When men would have given up the conflict of life in despair, how often has the word and life of a Christian filled them with new courage; and how frequently are careless souls awakened to a sense of duty by the moral earnestness of the godly around them. IV. *Like music, a godly life is calming.* What a quieting influence has the life of a good man upon those around him. His presence subdues anger; by his smile the deepest unrest is removed. He calms the passions of the unholy and soothes the sorrow of the troubled. V. *Are our lives morally musical?* Are they in harmony with God and all His works? Are our dispositions in the home, in business, and in the varied scenes of life kindly? If so, then are we the joy, the inspiration, and the quietude of many lives around us that might otherwise be sad, monotonous, and unpeaceful.—*The Lay Preacher.*

Vers. 64–66. **Divine punishment:** I. *Is proportioned to human sin.* "A recompense according to the work of their hands" (ver. 64). II. *Afflicts the chief instrument of human sin.* "Give them sorrow of *heart*" (ver. 65)—blindness of heart, obstinacy, hardness. III. *Is an appalling reality.* "Persecute and destroy them in anger" (ver. 66).

Ver. 65. God can entangle the head that thinks itself clearest, and sink the heart that thinks itself stoutest.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**It is best always to do justly.** Writing on the question of just treatment between the Southern and Northern States of America, and especially of the black race, G. W. Cable said: "But it is sometimes said, Will not this tend eventually to amalgamation? Idle question! Will it help the matter to withhold men's manifest rights? What can we do better for the remotest future than to be just in the present, and leave the rest to the Divine Rewarder of nations that walk uprightly?"

Justice between man and man. The doctrine which bases all the relations of employer and employed upon self-interest is a doctrine of the pit; it has been bringing hell to earth in large instalments for a great many years. You can have hell in your factory, or you can have heaven there, just as you please. If it is hell that you want, build your business on the law of hell, which is—Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Out of that will come fightings perennial and unrelenting. If it is heaven that you want, then build your business on the law of the kingdom of heaven, which is—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. That will put you in the path of peace.

Religion and justice. In the year 813 the Doge Angelo Participazio took vigorous means for the enlargement of the small group of buildings which were to be the nucleus of the future Venice. For the offices of religion he built the church of St. Mark, and on or near the spot where the Ducal Palace now stands he built a palace for the administration of justice. Observe that piety towards God and justice towards man have been at least the nominal purposes of every act and institution of ancient Venice. —*Ruskin.*

Wrong-doing brings its own retribution. Cosimo I., of Florence, was a ferocious, cruel tyrant, murdering his

own son in the presence of his mother. After a few years he married a wicked but beautiful woman, who had been a former partner in sin with him, and in his last days, broken with decrepitude, was helpless in her despotic hands. For two years after the palsy had deprived him of speech or movement, he lay dying, bereft of everything but a torturing memory of his cruelty and wickedness.

— The Jews have a tradition that Cain was doomed to carry Abel's corpse for a hundred years.

The just and the unjust. Such being our unjust man, let us place by his side a man of true simplicity and nobleness, resolved, as Æschylus says, not to seem, but to be good. We must certainly take away the seeming; for if he be thought to be a just man, he will have honours and gifts on the strength of this reputation, so that it will be uncertain whether it is for justice's sake or for the sake of the gifts and honours that he is what he is. Yes, we must strip him bare of everything but justice, and make his case the reverse of the former. Without being guilty of one unjust act, let him have the worst reputation for injustice, so that his virtue may be thoroughly tested and shown to be proof against infamy and all its consequences; and let him go on to the day of his death steadfast in his justice, but with a life-long reputation for injustice. They who prefer injustice above justice will say that in such a situation the just man will be scourged, racked, fettered, will have his eyes burnt out, and at last, after suffering every kind of torture, will be crucified; and thus learn that it is best to resolve, not to be, but to seem just.—*Plato's Republic.*

Injustice not to be hastily resented. When Aristides, the Athenian general, sat to arbitrate a difference between two persons, one of them said, "This fellow accused thee at such a time." To whom Aristides answered, "I sit not to hear what he has done against me, but against thee." That was a noble reply of Philip the Good when urged by his courtiers to punish a prelate who had done him great injustice, he declined, saying, "It is a fine thing to have revenge in one's power; but it is a finer thing not to use it."

God frustrates the schemes of the wicked. All the plots and contrivances of wicked men, all their turning of things upside down, are treated as the potter's clay; for when they think they have brought all to maturity, ripeness, and perfection, when they look upon their business as good as done, on a sudden all their labour is lost; for God, who stands by all the while and looks on, will, with one small touch, with the least breath of His mouth, blast and break all in pieces.—*Edlin.*

CHAPTER IV.

ZION'S PITIFUL ESTATE.

THE first half of this chapter is occupied with details connected with the ruthless overthrow and harrowing incidents in the conquest of Jerusalem. Distinct and vigorous expression is thereafter given to the intense conviction that the terrific disasters were traceable to the iniquities of the people, and especially of the ruling classes. They suffered from the anger of the Lord; but He would not contend for ever. There is hope that, after meting out justice to oppressors, He would *arise and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favour her: yea, the set time had come.* The shadows of the night were very dense, but streaks across them betoken to the spiritual eye that day is breaking, the day of restoration.

(א) Ver. 1. **How is the gold dimmed.** Not a mere diminution of its brightness, but a tarnishing which lowered the estimate of the ore. **The most pure gold changed**; something more than an alteration in the appearance of the purified metal is observed. The alteration is not in its substance, but in its depreciated value. **The stones of the sanctuary**—not only were precious stones worn on the garments of the High Priest, but the Temple also was *garnished for beauty* with them—**are poured out at the head of every street.** If this is regarded as having reference to the costly stones of the House of the Lord, the objection naturally arises that no enemy would be so reckless as to strew such precious material all over the city. Rather the whole verse is to be considered as a figurative representation of the sad lot of Jerusalem, not of its buildings but of its inhabitants, which will be told of in some verses following. A similar comparison is made by the prophet Zechariah, who foretells that *the sons of Zion shall be as the stones of a crown*, only not cast down, as here, but *lifted on high* (Zech. ix. 16).

(ב). Ver. 2 defines the objects of which the preceding verse was an illustration. **The precious sons of Zion**, grouping all the people together, *a kingdom of priests, an holy nation*, **comparable to**, weighed in one scale against **fine gold** in the other, he is astonished to see as in utter contrast with what they were. Three varieties of gold are mentioned—gold, pure gold, fine gold—as if the sons of Zion were precious beyond the most precious things; but the contrast between the high estimate and the degraded reality, between what the Lord formed them to be and foes had reduced them to, forces out the cry, **How are they reckoned as earthen pitchers**, made from ignoble materials by human hands, and easily broken to pieces (Jer. xix. 11).

Their humiliating condition is evidenced in children, adults, nobles, and mothers.

(ג). Ver. 3. Beasts of prey show affection for their brood. **Even the jackals draw out**—present—**the breast**; a familiar fact, testifying that they were true to their instincts, **they suckle their whelps**; but in miserable contrariety to this, **the daughter of my people has become** otherwise; unwilling to give nourishment to their babes, they show themselves **cruel, like ostriches in the desert.** This arraignment of the wild birds is according to ideas current at the time, and reported in the Book of Job. *She leaveth her eggs on the earth . . . she is hardened against her young ones, as if they were not hers* (chap. xxxix. 14, 16). Later observations require some modification of this account of the habits of the ostrich; but the writers of the Sacred Scriptures had not a knowledge of Nature beyond their times.

This fearful, unnatural result of the extreme trials of the Israelites had its correlated feature.

(ד). Ver. 4. **The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth**, because of getting no milk. **The young children ask bread, and no one divides to them the cakes** in which form it was made.

(ה) Ver. 5. Adults also are distressed. **They that did feed delicately**, in the fastidiousness of luxury, **are desolate in the streets**, with no one to serve them, with no means to satisfy hunger, perishing. **They that were brought up in scarlet**, those of the wealthy classes, accustomed to use the most expensive cloth, lay themselves, in sheer despair, on the dirt-heaps which have accumulated in the ruined city. Like Dives, *clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day*, they too are in darkness—only they in the visible, he in the invisible world.

(ו) Ver. 6. **Those awful distresses were due to the way in which the people had lived.** The crying wickedness of Sodom is again and again denounced by prophets as a warning to the Israelites. **Here that wickedness is minified, and**, from the long drawn out sufferings of the latter, **it is implied that the iniquity**—not *the punishment* of the iniquity, a translation which has not been established from the usage of the two corresponding Hebrew words elsewhere—**of the daughter of my people is greater than the sin of Sodom.** The Cities of the Plain had not the *advantage* which *the Jews* had, who *were intrusted with the oracles of God*, and their guilt was less. The supreme authority of Jesus Christ stands behind the declaration that it would be *more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment* than for those who refused the light of life. Moreover, Sodom was destroyed by a sudden stroke—no protracted sufferings, no starved, wailing children, no mothers eating their own infants, **overthrown as in a moment**, and by forces in which no human agency had any part; **hands did not encircle her.** No enemies brandished their swords against her inhabitants, investing her on every side. God can paralyse all industries and destroy a community without man's aid. The ground of this

preference of Sodom is that a trouble direct from God is more bearable than one inflicted by man, and was expressed by King David, *Let me fall into the hand of Jehovah . . . let me not fall into the hand of man* (1 Chron. xxi. 13).

(ז) Ver. 7. Men under religious vows could not have been so numerous as to form a conspicuous element in the population. Nor is there any reason to suppose that they were noted for a fine physique. Besides, the Hebrew word is not confined to those who are professed Nazarites, but applies to such as were distinguished from others. So Joseph, in Jacob's dying forecasts, is described as *him that was nazin, separate from* [marg. *that is prince among*] *his brethren* (Gen. xlix. 26). **Her nobles were purer than snow, &c.** Still another feature characterised them, **they were more ruddy in body than rubies.** "The white and red are to be understood as mixed, and shading into one another, as our popular poetry speaks of cheeks which 'like milk and purple shine'" (Delitzsch); *My beloved is white and ruddy* (Cant. v. 10); "My love is like the red, red rose" (Scottish song). **Sapphire was their polishing** [lit. figure]. The comparison, however, can only be with the brilliancy of the gem, not with its shape. The appearance of the nobles, as here described, indicates that their faces were not bronzed and seamed by exposure to all kinds of weather; no engrained dust from toiling day after day darkened their complexion. They looked as those who *live delicately in king's courts.* But now—

(ח) Ver. 8. **Darker than blackness is their visage; they are not recognised in the streets** as members of the aristocracy; nothing marks them off from the labouring classes. **Their skin cleaveth to their bones,** they are emaciated and shrivelled through hunger and anguish, and the skin **is become dry as wood.**

(ט) Ver. 9. One melancholy contrast suggests another, *i.e.*, between those who are dead and those who are tortured by want. **Better are the slain by the sword than the slain by hunger.** The next clause is more descriptive of the condition of the former than of the latter. The advantage of less prolonged and gnawing pains is with **those who pine away** [lit. flow away, as sinking from loss of blood gushing from ghastly wounds], **pierced through at a time when** there was no lack of food **from the fruits of the field.**

(י) Ver. 10. A more dreadful fact is related in regard to the little ones than that in vers. 3 and 4. **The hands of tender-hearted women**—not servants or hirelings, but themselves—**have boiled their own children they became meat for them in** that climax of sufferings, **the destruction of the daughter of my people.** Moral duty is sacrificed, and unnatural crimes committed at the shrine of physical cravings.

(כ) Ver. 11 is a conclusion from the immediately preceding verses, as ver. 6 is from those preceding it. **Jehovah has accomplished,** *i.e.*, has put forth a full measure of, **His fury; has poured out the fierceness of His anger,** and one method of its action is **He has kindled a fire in Zion, and has devoured her foundations.** The scenes of horror which have been depicted show the meeting-place of Zion's guilt and its Divine punisher. God's fierce wrath is the blast which consumes flagrant iniquities. The entire demolition of the former principles dominating the Israelites is thus symbolised, and so signifies that room is made for the new spirit which shall possess the restored captivity when they lay again the foundations of the House of the Lord.

A change of features is to be presented now by sketching, not so much the disasters on classes of the people, as the causes by which they were produced, and the baffled hopes ensuing.

(ל) Ver. 12. **The kings of the earth**—men who might be considered experts—**believed not, neither all the inhabitants of the world**—men who were moved by appearances and common hearsay—**that an adversary . . . should enter into the gates of Jerusalem.** This belief cannot be merely "a deep subjective conviction." Whether or not the city was previously taken is a matter of no importance. What is stated is a general opinion. The unverified belief would be grounded on the knowledge of the strong situation and careful fortifications of Jerusalem, which, with the means of siege then at command, might be considered almost impossible of capture. It was invested a year and a half before capture by the greatest warrior of the age. Besides this, there may well have been, since the remarkable repulse of Sennacherib, a wide-spread supposition, as when the tribes emerged from the desert, that the God of Israel was very mighty in the defence of His worshippers, and would not let His sacred city be subjugated.

(מ) Ver. 13. It is needful to connect this verse with the last by words like, *This incredible thing came to pass,* because of the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests—the position which these two classes assumed in the polity of Jerusalem is indicated in various strong terms by Jeremiah, the prophet of this period, and especially in his references to the treatment which he himself received at their hands (chap. xxvi.)—**who shed in her midst the blood of the righteous.** They are branded as instigators and leaders of the evil, and, like other occupiers of usurped power, their jealousy and anger at those who crossed them in any way urge them to the extreme measure of dooming to death the faithful witnesses for God. In thus declaring the causes of the calamity to Judah, there is once more uplifted the moral standard which has made the Bible to be the impulse to all ethical revivals, the rebuker of wrong **by whomsoever committed, the unswerving asserter of the rights of God in the face of man's injury to man.**

(נ ס) Vers. 14 and 15 seem applicable to the condition of prophets and priests after the city

had been taken. They were panicstricken. They staggered [as] blind men in the streets; an effect accounted for in other parts of Scripture as a punishment of sin. *They make haste to shed innocent blood . . . therefore we grope for the wall like the blind, yea, we grope as they that have no eyes* (Isa. lix. 7 and 10). Their sin found them out; its marks were palpable; they were defiled with blood when the command to go into exile arrested them. So they were avoided; [men] could not touch their garments. In their blood-stained aspect they were met with the shout which was enjoined upon leprous persons. That it was the leper who was to cry *unclean* is of little consequence where "poetical license" is exercised. Away unclean one [men], cried to them, away, away; and so such as had, in spiritual pride, said, *Come not near me, I am holier than thou*, are abhorred by the people they contemned. The just judgment of God was manifest, so that, as proscribed offenders, When they fled away and staggered blindly as before in the city, they found that, even in other places where they sought ease and rest for the soles of their feet, the natives would not allow them to stay; [men] said among the nations, They shall no longer sojourn [among us]. These references, in all probability, are made to real occurrences.

(ב) Ver. 16. The circumstances of those fugitives are ascribable to Jehovah. Wherever they went, the face of Jehovah had not disappeared; in anger, not in grace, lifted up upon them, it has scattered them, and will no more regard them. This fact was verified on their treatment by the peoples to whom they had gone. There no respect was paid, no favour shown, on account of office, occupation, or age.

(ג) Ver. 17 refers to the persons remaining in the city, who, notwithstanding that God's righteous judgments had so afflicted prophets and priests, yet thought longingly of human defences; Still our eyes failed [looking] for vain help. This is explained in the succeeding clause, We eagerly watched for a nation that could not save, trusting that Egypt, *that broken reed*, or perhaps some other equally unsatisfactory auxiliary, would appear to rescue them.

(ד) Ver. 18. Whatever their expectations might be, they were under constant pressure from the besieging army. They hunted our steps; every movement was closely watched, so that we could not go in our streets, there, liable to be laid hold on at every turn, all seemed to be over. The final cessation of their independence was but the question of an hour, our end is come, our national life extinguished.

(ה) Ver. 19. Flight from the city was of no benefit. Fugitives were promptly and hotly followed, whether they betook themselves to the cavernous retreats of *the everlasting hills*, or to waste and lonely places. Swifter were our pursuers than the eagles of heaven; on the mountains they chased us, in the desert they laid wait for us. So the deportation to Babylon is prepared for, and proof given of the complete break-up of the organised community of Israel.

(ו) Ver. 20. The crowning evidence of the collapse was the seizure of the head of the State, who is considered to have been, not King Josiah but Zedekiah, by most commentators. The breath of our nostrils, the token of our life, is the monarch. An idea like this was prevalent among ancient peoples, and a noticeable confirmation of it is quoted from Seneca, *De Clementia:* "He (the sovereign) is the vital breath which so many thousands (of citizens) draw." In his life the nation views the representative of its life. "God made David king, and his posterity, for this end that the life of the people might, in a manner, reside in him;" and so long as he was among them, there seemed to be a pledge of the favour of God, and so of their continued existence as a separated nation. Zedekiah might be irresolute and weak, but it is not personal character, it is office which is regarded—the anointed of Jehovah. "We must observe that these high terms properly belong to Christ only, for David was not the life of the people except as he was a type of and represented His person . . . and hence we learn that the Church is dead when separated from its Head" (Calvin). The representative of this earthly life of the nation had disappeared, was taken, "like a wild animal driven into a pitfall," in their pits. His capture by the hostile forces is related in Jer. lii. 7–11, and was achieved about a month prior to the sack of Jerusalem. It was the prelude to the conviction that their last hopes were being crushed. Of whom we said, Under his shadow we will live among the nations. As a captive to Babylon, there was not the ghost of a chance to rally round him, and no sort of prospect of existing as a semi-independent people in any foreign land. The end *had* come.

(ז) Ver. 21. *The children of Edom* had exulted over the destruction of Jerusalem, and urgently called for its completeness. They said, *Rase it, rase it, even to the foundations thereof* (Ps. cxxxvii. 7). Now they are addressed in bitter irony, Rejoice and be glad, daughter of Edom, take a full measure of your malicious joy, but with all that your triumphing will be short; you cannot escape pungent woes, however extended your territory may be, that dwellest in the land of Uz, a district of country bordering on Edom's land, and which seems to have been overrun by Edomites. To thee also shall the cup pass, *the cup of the wine of the wrath of God which is mingled in His anger.*

The strong feelings of indignation, which were almost hereditary among the Israelites, against the Edomites, may be partly accounted for from the idea that variance with one's own kith and kin is often expressed by more bitter terms than variance with strangers, and partly by the consciousness which Israel had of its spiritual calling which the "profane" nature of Esau's descendants tended to render inoperative.

(ח) Ver. 22. No hint marks the transition from the grim scenes of calamity in which the

Jews had been involved to this glimpse of light and renewal. **The abruptness must be due to** the conviction that, as Israel is the people with whom Jehovah has entered into covenant, all cannot be over with them, however they are pressed down by adversity. If they forsake Him, they will be chastised till they acknowledge and repent of their apostasy. Then He will have pity for His name's sake. Punishment will come to a termination; **Ended is thine iniquity,** daughter of Zion. The consequences following an evil procedure would, as it were, drain to the dregs the cup of wrath and grace would begin to appear. "A Messianic hope" is created, **He will no more carry thee into captivity,** by the Chaldeans, at any rate. This promise is dependent for its fulfilment upon the righteous state of Israel. Avoiding the sins which had brought the present term of punishment, they would not be subjected to such punishment again. The exiles who returned from Babylon were greatly purified and elevated by the trials which had been passed through, and if there had been due progress in spiritual things, as the prophet Malachi declares there was not, no further casting out of the land of promise would have taken place. But *they crucified the Lord of glory.* Their *house is left unto them desolate,* and they are scattered over the earth till *they turn again to the Lord.* The allotment to Edom is a contrast; **He visits thine iniquities, daughter of Edom; He discovers thy sins.** He sees they are persisted in, and shame and woe follow the exposure. "God covers sin when He forgives it (Ps. xxxii. 1–5). He discovers or reveals it when He punishes it" (Job xx. 27). **The safety of God's people connotes the destruction of His enemies (Rev. xxix. and xx.).**

HOMILETICS.

Moral Degradation.

(Verses 1, 2.)

The destruction of Jerusalem was an event so unexpected, so unparalleled, so astounding, that it seemed as if it could not be sufficiently lamented. The grief of the prophet is not yet exhausted. Once more he looks upon the fated city as it gradually but inevitably collapses in the tightening grasp of the relentless besiegers, and as he sees the miseries of his countrymen in their direful extremity, he renews his doleful elegy. He reiterates the doctrine that the sufferings of Judah are the just punishment of her sins, and not until the chastisement has had its proper effect is there any hope of her restoration. These verses describe the moral degradation and wretchedness of the sufferers, and suggest the following reflections.

I. **That moral degradation is the more evident when compared with a former condition of superior excellence.** The people of God are called "the precious sons of Zion," and their moral excellence is compared to "the most fine gold," and to the hallowed "stones of the sanctuary." Judah was a chosen and consecrated nation, and enjoyed unexampled privileges. She was raised not only into temporal affluence and splendour, but was intended to represent the lofty type of a moral and spiritual commonwealth. She was the custodian and teacher of spiritual blessings that were to enrich the world. She was the medium through which Jehovah sought to express His gracious purpose of salvation to the whole human race. No nation had been so exalted and so honoured. While she remained faithful to her calling, Judah was supreme and invulnerable among the nations. She shone with the lustre of the most fine gold, and her position was as secure as that of an impregnable fortress. But when she sinned she fell, and her fall was the more notable when contrasted with her former greatness and grandeur.

II. **That moral degradation is a loss of character and stability.** The moral reputation of Judah was tarnished—the gold was dimmed, the most fine gold changed. Three kinds of gold are mentioned in these verses—gold, most fine gold, and fine (or *solid*) gold. The precious metal not only lost its brilliancy but also its massiveness: it became thin and hollow. The religious character of God's people, which was compact and strong as the solid building of the sanctuary, is shattered, and lies in a heap of ruins, like the stones of the demolished Temple

that now block the streets of Jerusalem. Its moral value is destroyed. It is now of no more worth than a piece of brittle earthenware, which the swift hands of the potter can easily put together and as easily break. Sin is a great disintegrator of character. The external form may appear unchanged long after decay has set in; but the mischief is slowly and surely working, and the final collapse is inevitable. Nothing is safe where righteousness is ignored, whether in individuals or in nations.

III. **That moral degradation is the occasion of painful lamentation.** "How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers" (vers. 1, 2). Even the most callous are sometimes moved to pity as they witness the downfall of excellence which they often envied and could not reach. Misfortune softens the hard-hearted. But who can sound the depths of anguish of the soul that realises the greatness of the disaster occasioned by the fall of morality and religion! It is the loss of personal righteousness, happiness, and peace; the loss of national prestige; the loss of all the safeguards of social life; the loss of untold blessing to the world; and, greatest of all, the loss of the favour and smile of God! In the midst of moral wreckage and ruin, it is a hopeful sign when even one is left who sincerely mourns and laments the catastrophe. The tears of such an one shine with the lustre of the goodness whose loss he deplores.

LESSONS.—1. *Religion only can make a nation truly illustrious.* 2. *When religion declines, the glory of the nation is obscured.* 3. *The loss of religion should be not only lamented, but should lead to diligent search after its recovery.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1, 2. **Moral character:** I. Is the basis of individual worth. II. Gives reputation and stability to individual life. III. Needs to be carefully guarded.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Lack of moral sense.** It is no exaggeration to assert that Napoleon I., strangely called the Great, had no moral sense. Carlyle tells the story of a German emperor who, when corrected for a mistake he made in Latin, replied, "I am King of the Romans, and above grammar." Napoleon's arrogance was infinitely greater. He thought himself above morality. and really seems to have believed that he had a perfect right to commit any crime, political or personal, that would advance his interests by an iota; and indeed he did commit so many it is almost impossible to recount them.

Moral degradation affects work. The corrupted Papacy of the fifteenth century so injuriously affected the art world, that from that time there was a serious decline in all the arts of painting. sculpture, and architecture. The degradation of religion first touched public morality, and then spread to all the arts. Character tells on skill. Where the heart declines, the hand will soon disclose it. The "work of our hands" is only established as "the beauty of the Lord is upon us."—*Ruskin.*

Degeneration. In the Central Park Museum, at New York, there is the skeleton of a huge bird, now extinct. It is 14 feet in height; and by its side is a stuffed specimen of another bird not more than 14 inches. The latter is the nearest living representative of the former, which once abounded in New Zealand.

Degeneration of character. Rarely does a successful merchant who comes to New Orleans as a young man from the cooler latitudes leave a son who inherits the father's energy. One generation is enough to change character. A city that lies below the level of the river which washes its wharves, and only a few feet above the poisonous swamps surrounding it, and which has six sweltering summer months, must always continue to draw upon the north for new men to carry on its larger business activities.—*Smalley.*

Moral degradation of drink. It is

in the spiritual realm that the ravages of strong drink are most terrible. Many a mother observes, with a heart that grows heavier day by day, the signs of moral decay in the character of her son. It is not the flushed face and heavy eyes that trouble her the most; it is the evidence that his mind is becoming duller and fouler, his sensibilities less acute, his sense of honour less commanding. She discovers that his loyalty to truth is somewhat impaired, that he deceives her frequently without compunction. Coupled with this loss of truthfulness is the weakening of the will, which always accompanies chronic alcoholism. Then comes the loss of self-respect, the lowering of ambition, and the fading out of hope. It is a mournful spectacle—that of the brave, the ingenuous, high-spirited man sinking steadily down to the degradation of inebriety; but how many such spectacles are visible all over the land!

A good character a blessing. When Peter Cooper, the New York Philanthropist, held a reception at the Women's Art School shortly before his death, a most impressive testimony was given of the high regard in which his character was held. It was interesting to note the various manners of the crowd who approached him. "Mr. Cooper, we must put our little boy's hand in yours," said a young couple, with a child five or six years old at their side. Then a group of boys would come along and stand curiously regarding him from a short distance. "That's Mr. Cooper," they whispered in an undertone. And so the evening wore away, and ten thousand people had come and gone through the great bright halls and schoolrooms, and Mr. Cooper's presence had put a good thought or feeling into everybody's heart. I can see him now, with his smiling face and interested look, and his soft white hair waving over his shoulders, amid flowers, lights, and cheerful music, whilst his presence brooded like a benediction over the swaying and surging crowd.

HOMILETICS.

The Extremity of Suffering.

(Verses 3–10.)

I. Deadens natural affection (vers. 3, 4). Maternal instincts are demoralised in the straitness of the siege. Little children are left to perish, without any effort to relieve their wants or soothe their sufferings. In vain they ask for bread; no attempt is made to allay their hunger and thirst. Absorbed in their own intolerable miseries, the wretched mothers sink below the instincts of the wild beasts, for even the jackals suckle their young. They are become like the cruel crocodile, which, after laying its eggs in the sand, abandons them without further care. The infants pine to death, unheeded and unmourned. Excessive suffering denaturalises man and woman.

II. Drags down all classes to one level (ver. 5). The wealthy are now even as the poor. They who fared sumptuously, and whose tastes were pampered with the most delicate viands, are now sullenly starving to death with the crowd. They who were clothed in scarlet, and accustomed to every refinement from their infancy, are now content to stretch themselves on the dirt-heaps of the city, and eager to devour any offal they may pick up amid the general scramble for food. All men find a universal communism in suffering. Human extremity knows no distinction in ranks and titles. Hunger drags every one to the same level.

III. Prefers a swift to a lingering punishment (ver. 6). The destruction of Sodom, which filled a large space in the Jewish mind as an example of the terrible judgment of Heaven on extreme iniquity, was regarded as light compared with the sufferings of Jerusalem. The punishment of Sodom was sudden, and came direct from God; but the punishment of Judah was by the hands of the

Chaldeans, and was slow and lingering. David preferred to be dealt with directly from God, and chose pestilence rather than injuries inflicted by human hands (2 Sam. xxiv. 14). But the iniquity of Judah was greater than the sin of Sodom, and the punishment was therefore more severe. There is a point in suffering when we yearn for a speedy release; when death is welcome.

IV. **Reduces the healthiest from beauty to hideousness** (vers. 7, 8). The Nazarites, because of their temperance, were remarkable for health and personal beauty, and were held in veneration because of their religious devotion (comp. Num. vi.). Their complexion was ruddy as coral, and the beauty of their physical form was as exact and faultless as is the cutting of a sapphire. But the most distinguished of the population, whether Nazarites or of the aristocracy, are involved in the general calamity, and suffer with the rest. Their rosebud complexion is turned to blackness, their frame is shrunk and distorted, and their skin is shrivelled and dry. Famine plays havoc with beauty, and brings the strongest down to helplessness.

V. **Recoils not from the most horrible means of appeasing the irresistible pangs of hunger** (vers. 9, 10). Such were the sufferings of the famished, that they who were slain with the sword were deemed happier than those who were pierced with the dart of unappeased hunger. So extreme was the famine, that cannibalism became common, and women who were known as tender-hearted mothers actually boiled and ate their own children (comp. 2 Kings vi. 28, 29; Lev. xxvi. 29; Deut. xxviii. 56, 57; Josephus's "Wars," cap. x. 9). It is a fearful experience when the animal in human nature gains the mastery over every other instinct.

LESSONS.—1. *Extremity makes strange revelations of human nature.* 2. *The restraints of civilisation are very superficial.* 3. *Sin acquaints the soul with the lowest depths of degradation.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 3–10. The rigour of war. I. Demoralises maternal affection (ver. 1). II. Involves innocent children in suffering (ver. 2). III. Reduces all classes to poverty and distress (vers. 5, 7, 8). IV. Prolongs the misery of its victims (ver. 6). V. Is attended with the worst results of famine (vers. 9, 10).

Ver. 6. **Graduated punishment.** I. Is proportioned to the character and degree of the sin committed. II. Its severity implies the enormity of the offence. III. Cannot be charged with injustice.

Vers. 7–10. **The horrors of famine.** I. Changes strength into feebleness and beauty into deformity (vers. 7, 8). II. Is more cruel than the sword (ver. 9). III. Debases the most refined into cannibals (v. 10).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Degradation.** Is it not wonderful that base desires should so extinguish in men the sense of their own excellency, as to make them willing that their souls should be like to the souls of beasts, mortal and corruptible with their bodies?—*Hooker.*

There have been those—

> "Who, in the dark dissolving human heart,
> And hallowed secrets of this microcosm,
> Dabbling, with shameless jest, a shameful band,
> Encarnalised their spirits."

Importance of food. Temperature has less influence in inciting the migration of birds than failure of food; for a few even of the regular migrants will linger throughout the winter at sheltered localities, where food remains accessible, safely daring the severest cold. Hunger means loss of heat and life, and it is this the birds primarily flee. No attraction to Christians like spiritual food. "Tie them up by the teeth," as Mr. Spurgeon says.

Necessity a teacher. "Life and the necessities of life are the best philosophers, if we will only listen honestly to what they say to us; and dislike the lesson as we may, it is cowardice which refuses to hear it."—*Froude.*

— The wife of a certain chieftain who had fallen upon idle habits, one day lifted the dish-cover at dinner, and revealed a pair of spurs; a sign that he must ride and hunt for his next meal.

Help in extremity. In the Magdalen Islands, off the Newfoundland coast, the means of livelihood is almost entirely found in the fisheries, and if these fail, life becomes a burden. In 1883 a famine occurred which came near to decimating the population. The fisheries failed; the ship which was expected to bring the winter's supply before the ice formed foundered in a storm. By the time spring came, starvation stared the people in the face. Many must have died had not a large ship filled with produce been wrecked off Coffin Island. The news spread like wildfire. The population turned out, and from the cargo of a shipwrecked vessel drew a new lease of life.

Man's extremity is God's opportunity. It is a current saying, "That the darkest cloud precedes the dawn," and that "Every dark cloud has a silver lining." Early risers tell us that the lowest temperature immediately precedes the sun-rising. These things serve to illustrate God's kingdom of grace. "Before honour is humility." "Thou has lifted me up and cast me down." "How long, O Lord, how long?"

HOMILETICS.

The Destruction of Zion.

(Verses 11, 12.)

I. **Was thorough and complete.** "The Lord kindled a fire in Zion, and it devoured the foundations thereof" (ver. 11). The holy city, the pride of the Jews and the envy of their enemies, was utterly overthrown. Not only were its walls, towers, palaces, and Temple demolished, but its very foundations were dug up and scattered: one stone was not left upon another. It was degraded and spurned by the resolute destroyers as a heap of useless rubbish. It was impossible for the rage of man to make a more complete ruin. In the intention of the irate Chaldeans it was destroyed for ever. And yet the Divine Guardian of the holy city allowed all this!

II. **Was undeniable evidence of the reality of the Divine anger.** "The Lord hath accomplished His fury: He hath poured out His fierce anger" (ver. 11). There was more of the righteous anger of Jehovah against the obstinate sin of His people in the destruction of Jerusalem, than there were skill and ferocity in the Chaldean army. The enemy would have been powerless to pierce the city bulwarks if the people had remained true to Jehovah, and sheltered themselves in humble trust beneath His all-powerful defence. But the wrath of God was provoked beyond the limit of further endurance, and the Chaldeans were used as the instruments of His vengeance. Surely the eyes of the suffering people were at last opened to see in the utter destruction of their beloved city that Jehovah was indeed angry with them.

III. **Was a result deemed incredible by the nations.** "The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem" (ver. 12). Jerusalem was so strongly fortified, not only by massive walls and bulwarks, but by the strength and heroism of its inhabitants, that it was deemed impregnable to all warlike forces of that day. Moreover, it was regarded as the dwelling-place of the Great King, who had hitherto baffled all attempts to capture it. The recent defeat of Sennacherib, one of the greatest warriors of the age, was fresh in the memory of the people. The belief gained general currency that the city could not be taken. It was invested for a year and a half by the Chaldean forces, furnished with the most powerful engines of assault, before it was actually

captured. Its fall was the amazement of the world. What was believed impossible had come to pass. Others saw, what the Jews were slow to acknowledge, that their God had deserted them and given them up to the destroyer.

LESSONS.—1. *The holiest place may be polluted by sin.* 2. *Persistent sin provokes Divine vengeance.* 3. *Divine wrath is not poured out till every opportunity is given for repentance.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 11. The Divine anger. 1. Will accomplish all it threatens. 2. Is terrible in its active manifestation. 3. May well be dreaded by the impenitent.

Ver. 12. **A world's wonder.** 1. That a divinely guarded city should fall. 2. That it should fall by the hands of the godless. 3. That some great sin must have been committed to make such a catastrophe possible.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Terrible destruction.** One of the officers at Fredericksburg says:—"Howard, who was with me, says I exclaimed, 'Oh, great God, see how our men, our poor fellows, are falling!' I remember that the whole plain was covered with men prostrate and falling. I had never before seen fighting like that—nothing approaching it in terrible uproar and destruction. As they charged, the artillery fire would break up their formation, and they would get mixed; then they would close up, go forward, receive the withering infantry fire, and those who were able would run to their houses and do all they could; then the next brigade coming up in succession would do their duty, and melt. It was like the snow coming down and melting on warm ground."

Concentration of power destroys. In the eighteenth century an immense burning-glass was constructed in France, in which all the heat falling on a great lens was then concentrated on a smaller one, till at the focus such was the heat that iron, gold, and other metals ran like melted butter. Another one, made in England by Parker, fused the most refractory substances, and diamonds were by it reduced to vapour.

The Divine sovereignty. "God is free because no causes external to Himself have power over Him; and as good men are most free when most a law to themselves, so it is no infringement on God's freedom to say that He must have acted as He acted; but rather He is absolutely free because absolutely a law Himself to Himself."—*Froude.*

The curse of sin. It is the Trojan horse; it hath sword and famine and pestilence in the belly of it. Sin is a coal that not only blacks, but burns. Sin creates all our troubles; it puts gravel in our bread, wormwood in our cup. Sin rots the name, consumes the estates, buries relations. Sin shoots the flying roll of God's curses into a family and kingdom (Zech. v. 4). It is reported of Phocas, having built a wall of mighty strength about his city, there was a voice heard, "Sin is in the city, and that will throw down the wall"

HOMILETICS.

UNFAITHFUL RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

(Verses 13–16.)

I. Ignore the sacred duties of their high office. "The sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests" (ver. 13). The leaders, whose first duty it was to explain and enforce the Word of God, were the prime movers in the attempt to silence that Word. Their utter dereliction of duty, and the bitter rancour with which they were actuated, were evident in their repeated efforts to put Jeremiah to

death, the only man who had the courage to lift up his voice for Jehovah amid the general defection. Had they rallied round the faithful prophet and round their king, who was more weak than vicious, they might have saved the city and the nation from ruin. When the servants of the Lord and the religious guides of the people are false to their sacred vows, the nation is grievously misled, and disaster will follow.

II. **Become intoxicated with slaughter.** "That have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her; they have wandered (*reeled*) as blind men in the streets; they have polluted themselves with blood" (ver. 13, 14). They have lost the art of persuasion, even to do wrong, and, like all baffled tyrants, adopt the bloody policy of the sword. The people are coerced into rebellion against God and their best interests by brute force. Having once tasted blood, they revel in it, and reel through the city blinded by their insatiable lust of slaughter. They who ought to be holy, as God's ministers consecrated to His service, are defiled with blood, and that the blood not of enemies, but of their own countrymen. There is no fury so maddening and ungovernable as the thirst for blood.

III. **Are shunned and abhorred by God and man** (vers. 15, 16). They are denounced by the people they had oppressed, and hounded out of the city only to find themselves abhorred by the heathen to whom they fled for shelter. They were hated at home and abroad. "The anger of the Lord divided them," scattered them, and wherever they wandered, the people despised and shunned them. They were outcasts of God and men. They had sown to the wind, and they reaped the whirlwind. Such is the fate of the faithless and cruel. There is no punishment too severe for unfaithful ministers of God's Word.

LESSONS.—1. *False teachers are the curse of any community.* 2. *They are utterly reckless both as to what they say and do.* 3. *They involve the people in much suffering.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 13–16. **False ministers of God.** 1. Are the authors of the vilest sins (ver. 13). 2. Are capable of the most revolting cruelty in accomplishing their wicked ends (vers. 13, 14). 3. Are the execration of the people they oppress (ver. 15). 4. Are divinely punished (ver. 16).

Vers. 15, 16. **The tactics of the wicked.** 1. Recoil upon themselves. 2. Render them the abhorrence of all classes. 3. Are defeated and punished by the vengeance of Heaven.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Unqualified ministers.** It is the great wide-spread evil of the Church that it has unrenewed and inexperienced pastors; that so many become preachers before they become Christians, and are consecrated as priests at the altar of God before they are made holy to Christ by the offering of the heart to Him; and thus they worship an unknown God and proclaim an unknown Christ, and pray through an unknown Spirit, and preach a state of holiness and fellowship with Christ, and a glory and a blessedness which are wholly unknown to them, and perhaps will remain unknown through all eternity. He must indeed be a heartless preacher who has not himself in his own heart the Christ and the grace that he declares. Alas! that all scholars in our universities might well ponder this. —*Baxter.*

Unbelief and ministerial inefficiency. There are dangerous signs at the present day of a relaxation of moral tone in the literature of free-thinking. There is a tendency to palliate the offences of vicious characters and to treat every sin as atoned for by intellectual brilliancy. But it would be in the highest degree unjust to throw the whole blame of his error upon every individual who may happen to be the victim of unbelief. We are all bound up together in this matter; and the sins, the unfaithfulness, the lack of

moral energy among Christians themselves contribute, to a great extent, to weaken the testimony to our faith. The ministers of God's Word must bear their share in this responsibility. So far as they fail to exhibit the moral truth and spiritual force of that Word, so far as they harden it, or obscure it, or misrepresent it, they contribute to weaken its appeal to the hearts and consciences of their fellows, and the result is seen in many an indirect and distant injury to faith. It is the mission of the Church and its ministers to carry on the work of the Apostles by bearing witness to certain truths and revelations; and if that witness be in any instance unworthily delivered, the force with which the truth appeals to the soul of man is proportionately weakened. *Wace: Bampton Lectures.*

Priestcraft. The whole system is one of *Church* instead of *Christ; priest* instead of *Gospel;* concealment of truth instead of manifestation of truth; ignorant superstition instead of enlightened faith; bondage where we are promised liberty—all tending to load us with whatever is odious in the worst meaning of priestcraft, instead of the free, affectionate, enlarging, elevating, and cheerful liberty of the children of God. *Bishop M'Ilwaine.*

Penalty of murder. Thales Milesius, one of the wise men of Greece, being asked what was the most difficult thing in life, answered, "For a tyrant to live to old age." The application may be extended to the cruel, bloodthirsty, and murderers.

The triumph of the wicked. The triumph of the wicked is always short. When they feel themselves secure from evil and begin to boast of their triumph, then judgment overwhelms them. So it was with Belshazzar, Herod, and the fool of the Gospel. How soon Abel's blood called for vengeance of Cain! We cannot sin so quickly but God seeth us as quickly. How many have been stricken while the oath had been in their mouths, as Jeroboam was stricken while he spoke, that they might see they were stricken. Though a man sin often, and steal his sins as it were without punishment, yet at last he is taken napping, even while the wickedness is in his hand, and his day is set when he shall pay for all, whether it be twelve months or twelve years. "When it cometh, it will be soon."

HOMILETICS.

The Last Hours of a Doomed People.

(Verses 17–20.)

I. Every hope of rescue is disappointed. "Our eyes failed for our vain help: we have watched for a nation that could not save us" (ver. 17). Israel had been prone to rely on the help of Egypt, and was often bitterly deceived. In this instance the deluded inhabitants looked eagerly, till their eyes were weary, for the coming of a relief force from Egypt, but in vain. That treacherous kingdom, which had failed them so often before, again failed them in their extremity. Whatever aid they might expect from the neighbouring kingdoms with which Judah had been in friendly alliance, it did not come. When the soul is alienated from God, every reliable source of help is cut off. When God will not help us, man cannot.

II. Every avenue of escape is closely guarded. "They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets. Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles; they pursued us, they laid wait for us" (vers. 18, 19). The enemy was drawing his lines more firmly round the city; the investment was complete, and slowly but surely he was gaining the mastery over the city. Impatient with the little progress made and enraged with the stubborn resistance of the besieged, the Chaldeans missed no opportunity to do damage. Every stray wanderer in the streets was a

mark for their arrows, and those who attempted to escape from the festering city were at once seized.

III. **There is a deepening conviction that the end is near.** "Our end is near; our days are fulfilled, for our end is come" (ver. 18). The sight of the towers erected by the besiegers advancing in height filled the citizens with terror. Weakened with famine and disease, distracted with divisions among themselves, and alarmed with the steady encroachments of the enemy, they felt that further resistance was useless; they waited in sullen helplessness for the end. The end soon came.

IV. **The last vestige of hope is destroyed in the capture of their king.** "The anointed of the Lord was taken in their pits" (ver. 20). Feeble as Zedekiah was, he was still their king, "the anointed of the Lord." "And now that the state was falling, he was the very breath of life to the fugitives, who would have no rallying-point without him; whereas if he escaped, they might with him have found a refuge among some of the neighbouring nations, and as long as they had a king of David's line all hope of prolonging their national existence would not seem lost." But the seizure of Zedekiah in his desperate attempt to escape, and the cruelty of his infuriated captors in putting out both his eyes, quenched the last lingering hope of the doomed people. Their king was a sightless, helpless prisoner, and all was over. The national life was extinguished. We cannot but admire the dogged bravery of the people in their resolute defence of king and country; but it was the bravery of desperation and despair. The fiat of destruction had gone forth, and it was now fulfilled in every detail.

LESSONS.—1. *The nation that rebels against God is defenceless.* 2. *The threatenings of God against disobedience are not meaningless.* 3. *Between the threatening of doom and its accomplishment there is ample opportunity for repentance and reform.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 17. **The weary watcher.** 1. Eagerly longs for much-needed help. 2. Impairs his eyesight with the intensity of his vigil. 3. Is bitterly disappointed when he looks for help in vain.

Vers. 18, 19. **The helplessly baffled.** I. *Are everywhere menaced with danger.* "They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets" (ver. 18). II. *Retreat is cut off in every direction.* "Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles" (ver. 19). III. *Sullenly submit to the inevitable.* "Our days are fulfilled, for our end is come" (ver. 18).

Ver. 20. **Royalty.** 1. Is the symbol of government and protection. 2. Is the representative of national life and character. 3. Its degradation involves national disaster.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Disappointment.** When Daniel O'Connell, on account of his ill-health, was ordered to leave England, he started for Rome, having had for many years a desire to see that city. In the city of Genoa he was seized with paralysis, was unable to proceed farther, and died there, never having looked upon the longed-for sight.

A clever escape. When Mazzini fled from France, he had to risk being seized by the French police at Marseilles. He refused to be hidden as a stowaway, and when they came to look for him, they passed without notice a man in his shirt-sleeves coolly washing bottles in the cook's kitchen.

A sad end. Cardinal Pole, suspected even by Queen Mary, whom he had liked to serve, was on his death-bed when she died. Among the last sounds that fell on his ears must have been the bells of Westminster ringing the knell of the cause to which he had sacrificed his life; and before the evening he too had passed away, a blighted, broken-hearted man, detested by those whom he had laboured most anxiously to serve.

Attachment stronger than death. On the 18th of December 1851, Turner the painter died in the front room of 119 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, fronting the Thames. To an upper window, no longer able to paint, too feeble to walk, he had been wheeled every morning during those last days, that he might lose no light of the December sun on his beloved Thames.

The last parting.

"How shall we know it is the last good-bye!
The skies will not be darkened in that hour,
No sudden blight will fall on leaf and flower,
No single bird will hush its careless cry,
And you will hold my hands, and smile or sigh
Just as before. Perchance the sudden tears
In your dear eyes will answer to my fears;
But there will come no voice of prophecy;
No voice to whisper, 'Now, and not again,
Space for last words, last kisses, and last prayer,
For all the wild unmitigated pain
Of those who, parting, clasp hands with despair.'
'Who knows?' we say; but doubt and fear remain.
Would any *choose* to part thus unaware?"

A good king a blessing. Speaking of the reign of Leopold I. of Tuscany, as compared with the despotism of the Medicis, Mr. Howells says:—"I confess that it has a great charm for my fancy. It is like a long stretch of sunlight in that lurid, war-clouded landscape of history, full of repose and genial, beneficent growth. For twenty-six years, apparently, the good prince got up at six o'clock in the morning and dried the tears of his people. In his time, ten years passed in which no drop of blood was shed on the scaffold. The hospitals that he founded, the order and propriety in which he kept them, justly entitled him to the name of Father of the Poor. He was happy because he saw his people were happy. He believed in God."

Uncertainty of royal favours.

"Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye;
I feel my heart new opened. Oh, how wretched
Is that poor man that hangs on prince's favours!
There is betwixt that smile we should aspire to,
That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin,
More pangs and fears than wars or women have;
And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
Never to hope again." —*Shakespeare.*

HOMILETICS.

The Fate of the Malevolent.

(Verses 21, 22.)

I. Their malicious joy over the unfortunate is brief. "Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom" (ver. 21). Edom, though related to Judah, was her most relentless enemy. It was the enmity of inveterate envy. Judah had outdistanced Edom, and rose to superior greatness and power. This was the offence Edom could never forgive. She watched the downfall of Judah with a savage delight, and when the catastrophe came, which she did her best to accelerate, she gloated over it with a fiendish joy (Ps. cxxxvii. 7; Jer. xlix. 7–22). The prophet now ironically calls upon Edom to take her fill of her unnatural merriment, for it would soon be silenced and changed into a song with a different tune. Having made common cause with the enemies of God's people and become their aiders and abettors in oppression, Edom must share in the calamities that overwhelmed them. Edom is the type of the enemies of the Church in all ages, who, instigated with "envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness," exult in the misfortunes of God's people. What a revelation is this of the possible wickedness of the human heart! Well might Vianny write, "The heart of the wicked swarms with sins like an anthill with ants. It is like a piece of bad meat—full of worms." But the triumph of the morally bad is short.

II. **They will be certainly punished for their wickedness.** 1. *It will be a punishment involving suffering and disgrace.* "The cup also shall pass through unto thee: thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked" (ver. 21).

"*Thou, too, shalt be drunk with the shame of ruin: thou, too, shalt expose thyself to contempt.*"—*Geikie.* The wine-cup of the Divine wrath will by-and-bye be placed in the hands of His enemies, and they must drink it—drink it till they are infatuated with the intoxicating draught, and commit follies and sins that sink them into utter contempt. Now they know something of the bitterness of the suffering over which they had gloated when others were the victims. 2. *It will be a righteous punishment.* "He will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will discover thy sins" (ver. 22). To uncover and expose sins is equivalent to punishing them. Edom was punished not arbitrarily and from caprice, but because of her iniquity. The Divine chastisements are in harmony with the law of universal righteousness. God knows exactly the time and the measure of punishment. The cup of His wrath is not passed on to either individual or nation until it is full. The wicked cannot escape.

III. **Their punishment will be intensified by the deliverance of the people whose miseries they ridiculed.** "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion: He will no more carry thee away into captivity" (ver. 22). Judah shall not be exiled again for the iniquity, the guilt of which is now expiated. It would be unjust to punish twice for the same offence. She has borne the punishment: it is finished; and she is now free—free to enter upon a course of obedience which will secure promised blessing. The tables are now turned. Judah is free: Edom is the sufferer; and it adds sharpness to the thorns that now distress her to know that her hated rival is delivered and is again in the ascendant. Envy gives the soul no rest, and deteriorates its capacity for nobler feelings.

> "The cankering rust corrodes the brightest steel;
> The moth frets out your garment, and the worm
> Eats its slow way into the solid oak:
> But Envy, of all evil things the worst,
> The same to-day, to-morrow, and for ever,
> Saps and consumes the heart in which it works."—*Cumberland.*

We should be careful not to exult over the miseries of others, as we know not how soon we may be in the same plight, and the memory of our inhuman conduct will increase our own suffering.

LESSONS.—1. *Only the wilfully malicious can rejoice over the distresses of others.* 2. *Inveterate wickedness is sure to receive its just recompense.* 3. *Punishment is concerned only with the guilt already incurred.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 21, 22. **Two kinds of joy.** I. *The joy of the envious.* "Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom" (ver. 21). 1. Is full of malice. 2. Is cruel. 3. Is unreal—the dry chuckle of the scornful. II. *The joy of the free.* "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion" (ver. 22). 1. Indicates relief from suffering. 2. Despair has given place to hope. 3. Has the ring of grateful reality.

Punishment. I. *Discovers and exposes sin.* "He will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will discover thy sins" (ver. 22). II. *Stupifies and degrades the victim with the contents of its mingled cup.* "Thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked" (ver. 21). III. *Is sure to overtake the transgressor.* "The cup also shall pass through unto thee" (ver. 21). IV. *Does not cease till its mission is fulfilled.* "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion" (ver. 22).

Ver. 22. **A message from God to thee.** I. *Our first message is one of comfort.* 1. A joyous fact. "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished." Christ hath for His people borne all the punishment which they deserved. 2. To whom this message is sent. To the sinner conscious of his

sin. 3. A precious promise. "I will no more carry thee away into captivity." Thou art in captivity now, sorrowing on account of sin; but it is the last thou shalt ever have. In the world to come there is no captivity for thee. II. *A burden of woe.* "He will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom." 1. The daughter of Edom dwelt carelessly in the land of Uz, as if secure from danger. 2. Made merriment over the sorrows of others. 3. Cherished a vain hope, a self-sufficient confidence. 4. Was very proud. III. *Why are there these different messages?* 1. The reason of the message of mercy is sovereign. 2. Of the message of woe, Divine justice. IV. *What claim have these messages on our faith?* To be devoutly believed, because both messages are plainly revealed in the Word of God.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Malice.**

"For malice will with joy the lie receive,
Report, and what it wishes true, believe."
—*Yalden.*

Reproof of malice. St. Augustine is said to have had these two lines inscribed on his table to remind his guests of his wishes—

"Whoever loves an absent friend to jeer,
May hence depart, no room is for him here."

A malevolent tongue. The tongue of the slanderer is a devouring fire, which tarnishes everything it touches; which exercises its fury on the good grain equally as on the chaff, on the profane as well as on the sacred; which, wherever it passes, leaves only desolation and ruin; digs even into the bowels of the earth and fixes itself on things the most hidden; turns into vile ashes what only a moment before had appeared to us so precious and brilliant; acts with more violence and danger than ever in the time when it was apparently smothered up and almost extinct; which blackens what it cannot consume, and sometimes sparkles and delights before it destroys.—*Massillon.*

Wickedness. There have been men *splendidly* wicked whose endowments threw a brightness on their crimes, and whom scarce any villainy made perfectly detestable, because they never could be wholly divested of their excellences; but such have been in all ages the corrupters of the world, and their resemblance ought no more to be preserved than the art of murdering without pain.

— I have seen men who, I thought, ought to have a whole conversion for each one of their faculties. Their natures were so unmitigatedly wicked that it cost more for them to be decent than for other men to be saints.—*Beecher.*

Sin will find you out. Men's sins often find them out, though no visible sign or token may betray this fact to the world. All may outwardly stand fair; there may be no breach in the worldly prosperity; nay, this may be ampler, more strongly established than ever; while yet there may be that within which forbids to rejoice, which takes all the joy and gladness out of life—the memory of that sin which was nothing when committed, but which now darkens all—the deadly arrow poisoning the springs of life, which will not drop from the side, which no force, no art of man's device can withdraw. To such Dr. Trench's advice is, to turn the tables on our sins, to find them out, and to take them all to God to be condemned, pardoned, and subdued; "condemned by Thy righteous judgments, O Father; pardoned by the precious blood of Thy dear Son, and subdued by the mighty operation of the Holy Ghost." This is the good, old-fashioned preaching of Apostles and preachers of the very oldest times.

The downward career of evil. In the Rabbinical books of the Jews they have a curious tradition about the growth of leprosy, that it began with the walls of a man's house; then, if he did not repent, entered his garments, till at last the disease covered his whole body. And thus it is with the growth of sin. It begins with neglect of duty; it may be of prayer, or the warning voice of conscience is unheeded. Habits of sin are formed, till at last the soul that lets God alone is let alone by God.—*Pilkington.*

CHAPTER V.

RECAPITULATION OF ZION'S CALAMITIES AND PRAYER.

THE verses of this chapter are not arranged according to the order of the alphabet, yet their number corresponds to its number. More distinctly than the preceding chapters this one shows the "parallelism" of Hebrew poetry, in which one clause of a verse is closely related by sentiment and construction to the other. The contents suggest that the circumstances of the writer impelled him to take a retrospect of what had befallen his fellow-countrymen, and to found, on the variety and intensity of their sorrows, a hope that their iniquities would be pardoned, and that they would receive from the Lord's hand tokens of His restored favour, according to the days wherein He had afflicted them.

Ver. 1. **Remember, O Jehovah, what has happened to us**—an application not to one who had forgotten, but to One who could *consider their affliction and pain with a view to forgive all their sins and redeem Israel out of all his troubles;* a prayer which is not so much an utterance concurrent with the nature of God, as concurrent with the partial knowledge and felt needs of the worshipper; **behold, and see our reproach**, *the reproach of Thy servants . . . wherewith Thine enemies have reproached, O Jehovah, the footsteps of Thine anointed.*

Ver. 2 begins to describe the substance of the reproaches. **Our inheritance**, the land which was promised to Abraham, and of which his descendants had held possession for generations, **is turned over unto strangers.** Indeed, all their property had passed into other hands; **our houses unto aliens.** Even if any small houses were left standing, after the Chaldeans had destroyed every important building in Jerusalem, besides breaking down the city walls, they were at the disposal of those foreigners.

Ver. 3. No recondite application of the terms of this verse—as that, "We are abandoned by Thee, our Father"—need be considered. The note of a Targum sufficiently defines them, "We are like the most desolate of beings." **We have become orphans, without a father.** A devastating war, a merciless capture of Jerusalem, a banishment to a far country of thousands of the population, must have caused reports of many among the "bread-winners" being dead or missing; hence it could be said virtually, if not really, **Our mothers [are] like widows**, the words being true of other families as well as of those whose head had perished.

Ver. 4. Not only are they orphaned and desolate, but they are cruelly mulcted. **Our water for money we have drunken.** The bitterness of the act was that water, perhaps from their own wells and cisterns, had to be paid for, and similarly to that, **Our wood has come for a price.** Held in such durance that they could not get the requisites for personal and domestic comfort, to which they had free access formerly, unless by bribing their custodians.

Ver. 5. It is best to suppose that the phrase, **On our necks we are pursued**, means, our pursuers keep so close as to be, as it were, holding our necks; yet, tired out by such persecution, **no rest is for us.**

Ver. 6. Judæa was on the verge of famine through the foragings of the invaders, and, under the ominous shadow of starvation, **To Egypt we have given the hand**, *i.e.*, imploring supplies of food, as is signified by the parallel clause, **to Assyria to be satisfied with bread.** The people appealed to a supposed friendly and to an openly hostile government; for the Babylonian empire, even in the height of its power, was occasionally spoken of as Assyria (Jer. ii. 18), into whose dominion it had entered.

Ver. 7. **Our fathers have sinned; they are not** in the land of the living. The hour of punishment had not come in their time. The measure of iniquity was not yet full; but the consequences of their *doings, which were not good*, had not been buried with them. The disruption of civil and religious order, by which we have so fearfully suffered, results from the guilt which was incurred by preceding generations. **We have borne their iniquities.** This truth is stated again and again in the Old Testament Scriptures (Exod. xx. 5; Num. xiv. 18; 2 Kings xxiii. 25, 26); it is, however, only half a truth, and becomes an error if understood to say that the descendants were not also guilty. This other half was beginning to dawn upon Israel. It is noted in ver. 16, and was boldly announced by the prophets of this period, Jeremiah (chap. xxxi. 29, 30) and Ezekiel (chap. xviii.). Yet God strikes the sins of forefathers with penal judgments on their children only when the children persist in sin, as their predecessors did. But such vicarious suffering placed them in a position like sin-bearers, and becomes ground of appeal for the exercise of Divine compassion.

Ver. 8. **Servants have ruled over us.** Who they were may be uncertain. It is a far-fetched supposition that they were the conquering chiefs, because "the Babylonians in general might be called slaves in comparison with the *kingdom of priests* and *sons of Jehovah.*" The suggestion rather is that the galling yoke was made doubly galling by the insolence and brutality of menials, "dressed in the brief authority of office," slaves in Oriental countries often rising to places of power. A parallel is mentioned by Nehemiah, who says (chap. v. 5), *Even their* (*i.e., the governor's*) *servants bare rule over them:* **there was no deliverer from their hands.**

Ver. 9. **With our lives we get our bread**—they jeopardised their lives when going to gather a scanty harvest, or to take from provisions which had been stowed away—**because of the**

sword of the desert, wielded by the predatory Bedawin, who would plunder and even kill those who were in possession of food. So Gideon had to get his wheat in secret, lest the Midianites should seize it (Judges vi. 11); and the ten men who bought their lives from the robbers and murderers of Gedaliah (Jer. xli. 8) drew from concealed stores of victuals.

Ver. 10. The bread, which was obtained at the risk of their lives, was not enough in quantity to nourish them. **Our skin is hot like an oven;** the feverishness is because of the burning heat of hunger. "Hunger dries up the pores of the skin, so that it becomes like as if it had been exposed to the burning heat of the simoom."

We must not fancy that the several distressing things alluded to befell every one of all classes. We should rather believe that some troubles were felt by one portion, while another portion had to bear different troubles. So the author proceeds to record what sufferings were endured by particular divisions of the population.

Ver. 12. The most gentle were outraged, and **princes were hanged up by their hand**—not the hand of the foe is referred to, though by him the cruel deed was perpetrated; still less is the reference to compulsory suicide, as Calvin surmises; but the hand of the princes was the leverage by which their bodies were lifted up. Whether they were first killed and then suspended, or were tortured by such suspension when every nerve and muscle was vibrating with life's waves, is a question to which no sure reply can be given; but probably the latter is hinted at. The bodies of Saul and his sons were fastened to the wall of Beth-shan (1 Sam. xxxi. 10–12); and more recent commentators refer to "Records of the Past," i. 38, in which an inscription of Sennacherib is quoted as saying of the people of Ekron, "The chief priests and noblemen I put to death; on stakes all round the city I hung their bodies;" and the practice seems to have been not uncommon among Assyrians and Babylonians. Still, impalement after death does not correspond distinctly to the atrocity mentioned here. **The faces**—persons—**of elders were not honoured.** Not only men high in rank, but also those who held responsible positions among the people—aged persons are spoken of after this—were treated with indignity in the insolence of conquest.

Ver. 13. The choice portion of the nation were forced to be nothing but mere burden-bearers. **Young men bare the mill.** They had to carry about, and no doubt to turn, the hand-mills to grind corn for their military masters, thus doing the work of women or of slaves; while the fuel, for cooking and other purposes, was laid on shoulders ill able to bear a load. **Boys stumbled [under] a burden of wood.**

Ver. 14. Entire collapse of interest in the common ways of life was shown by the abandonment of public meetings and social pastimes. **The elders ceased from [frequenting] the gate.** They had gone thither as to the usual gathering-place; they adjudicated, advised, had general intercourse, and received the marks of respect suggested by the law—*Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head and honour the face of the old man* (Lev. xix. 32); but that resort was no longer theirs. Moreover, the buoyancy of youthful spirits was crushed down. **Young men ceased from their music,** accompanied by instruments.

Ver. 15. The iron had entered the soul. **Ceased is the joy of our heart,** and past pleasures had become a pain; **turned into mourning our dance.**

Ver. 16. **Fallen is the crown from our head.** That which was their honour has gone—the crown with which the Lord Jehovah had decked His chosen nation. *I put . . . a beautiful crown upon thine head . . . and thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty; for it was perfect through my majesty, which I had put upon thee* (Ezek. xvi. 12 and 14). Now it is in the dust, set at nought by all those who had admired it. So, as if in irrepressible acknowledgment that they themselves were responsible for the dismal change, the exclamation bursts forth, **Woe unto us! for we have sinned**—sinned not against a ritual or a code of law, but against a living Person—Maker, Monarch, Father. This second clause is in correlation with ver. 7, and expresses the share which their own iniquities had in the guilt which had drawn down such condign suffering as they were subjected to. Like their fathers, they had disowned truth and righteousness, and addicted themselves to false and unholy practices. This view of themselves, and confession of its evil nature, opens the eyes of the heart to look for the throne of grace.

Ver. 17. How depressing is the conviction of personal sin. **For this our heart has become faint.** Many sorrows had surged over them and exhausted the faculty of external and mental vision. **For these things our eyes are darkened.**

Ver. 18. The depression of heart meets its most striking symbol in that which, once the glory of the land, is now its reproach. **As to Mount Zion**—regarded as embracing both the dwelling-place of Jehovah and the precincts of the sacred city, **which is desolate; jackals roam in it.** These animals live in waste places, and avoid man's presence, so their wandering upon Zion proves that it has become a ruinous area, without inhabitant. *The place of the tabernacle of thy glory, the hill and the watch-tower,* are turned into dens for wild beasts.

Ver. 19. Nevertheless, whatever be the low estate of His sanctuary and people, the living God is and reigns. **Thou, O Jehovah, abidest for ever.** Not only is His continual existence denoted, but also that *Jehovah sitteth as king for ever* (Ps. xxix. 10), the same verb being used in this clause as in the Psalm quoted, and the next clause carries on the thought, **Thy throne from generation to generation.** Enemies may destroy the temple made with hands; they

are powerless to injure the kingdom of *Him who inhabits eternity.* Generations come and go with their rises and falls, *but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.*

Ver. 20. The perpetuity of God's rule, amid all earthly changes, frames an appealing prayer. Reigning supreme over the army of heaven, it is impossible that He can renounce authority over the things of earth and man; then, Why dost Thou forget us for ever, forsakest us for so long? Is it not time for Thee to pluck Thy right hand out of Thy bosom and bring relief in the lifetime even of this generation? How bluntly petitioners address God when troubles press upon them! How ready to suppose His thoughts and ways must be like their own! How prone to fancy that, because their observation does not perceive His working, God can hardly care so much for His kingdom's honour as they do!

Ver. 21. Turn us, O Jehovah, unto Thee, and we shall be turned; a prayer which proves that a new heart has been given to those in whose name the writer speaks. Affliction has been a means of showing the blunders and sins of the past, and that the only remedy for them is in Jehovah Himself. They see that the reconciling power does not originate with themselves, but with Him; that He must draw them by a continual influence if they are to *walk in the light of His countenance.* We do not consider this request as merely for the restoration of their native land; we need to put a deeper meaning into it, which will, at least, indicate that they wanted to become true worshippers of the Lord God of their deliverances. The succeeding clause, however, seems to imply that they did not expect to attain to their desires unless they were repossessed with their former national organisation. Renew our days as of old; re-establish the gracious relations in which thou stoodest to us; let us again have country, city, and temple, priest, prophet, and king. *Cause every man to sit under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none make them afraid.*

Ver 22. The two initial Hebrew particles of this verse signify that it is not a fact which is stated, but the elements of a hope, and may be introduced with, This will come to pass, unless Thou hast utterly rejected us; art wroth against us exceedingly. The under-thought is, But this cannot be the case. Thou wouldst *not so disgrace the throne of Thy glory.* Thou wouldst not so falsify the *promises made to our fathers.* Thou wouldst not always give occasion for the mocking *heathen to say, Where is now your God?*

"This conclusion entirely agrees with the character of the Lamentations, in which complaint and supplication continue to the end, not without an element of hope, which, as Gerlach says, 'merely glimmers from afar, like the morning star through the clouds, which does not indeed itself dispel the shadows of the night, though it announces that the rising of the sun is near, and that it shall obtain the victory'" (*Keil*).

HOMILETICS.

A Piteous Appeal to Jehovah.

(Verse 1.)

Once more, and for the last time, the prophet returns to his sorrowful theme. There is a fascination in it he cannot resist. Grief, unduly indulged, is apt to make us selfish, and so to accustom us to a grievance that we never wish to be without one: we coax and caress our troubles rather than seek to be rid of them. But the sorrow of the prophet arose from no mere personal distress. He was the mouthpiece to express the lamentations of the best spirits of his day over a national and world-wide disaster. His poetic and prophetic insight fitted him the more clearly to grasp and weigh the magnitude of the calamity. The profound and passionate grief with which he recited the leading incidents in the national catastrophe tended to stamp them with indelible distinctness upon his memory. He could never forget them, and it would seem as if he could not cease talking about them. As if with a clinging fondness for the theme and loathe to dismiss it, he passes in slow and final review the chief features of the siege and capture of Jerusalem. "Thus wailed the genius of Hebrew poetry over the desolation of Judah and Jerusalem! Other cities and countries have had their minstrels to lament their public sorrows, but the national elegies of the Jew alone have spread among all races of the earth, and remain fresh after twenty-five centuries. Nor are they even yet without deep and practical interest, recording as they do the catastrophe that awaits any community, however highly favoured, which forgets that public and private righteousness alone secures permanent prosperity" (*Geikie*). This fifth and last elegy begins and ends in prayer. It is a hopeful sign when trouble

brings us to our knees. We are then in the way of receiving comfort and delivering help. This verse is a *piteous appeal to Jehovah.*

I. **Rising from the hearts of a suffering people.** "Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us." The trouble is not simply threatened and approaching: it is upon us; we are now in the midst of it, and cannot be in a worse plight than we are in already. Our nation ruined, our city gone, our Temple gone, and the spiked heel of the oppressor even now presses us in the dust. If Thou canst do anything for us, O Lord, do it now. The cry of real suffering has an irresistible pathos about it: there is the sound of tears in it. Such a cry never fails to reach the ears of Jehovah, and His pitying heart yearns to help the suppliant.

II. **Is expressed by a people who regard their sufferings as a reproach.** "Behold our reproach." We are sunk from dignity and greatness to abject humiliation and shame, from affluence to poverty. We are the people of Jehovah, chosen by Him and publicly acknowledged by Him before the world. He has wrought miracles of power on our behalf, and we thought we were lifted above the possibility of change and decay to which other nations were liable. But now we are abandoned by our Divine Protector, and have become objects of scorn by our oppressors. Our calamities reflect upon the name and honour of Him who has done so much for us: our reproach is His reproach. So they thought; and so think the privileged in all ages when trouble overtakes them. They are apt to blame any one but themselves, and are slow to see that their distresses are the fruits of their own sins.

III. **Is uttered with the confidence that His help will be graciously afforded.** "Remember, consider, behold." Remember what is past, the sufferings we have had; and behold and consider the present, the sufferings under which we at this moment writhe. Is this nothing to Thee, O God of our fathers? Is it a matter of indifference to Thee that Thine own children are in such abject woe? It cannot be. Our fathers sinned and so have we; but we repent. We are still the heirs of the promises. Lord have mercy, and fulfil Thy word unto Thy servants. It is a great help to prayer to believe that God not only sees and commiserates our miseries, but that He is able and willing to help us.

LESSONS.—1. *God is not indifferent to the sufferings of His people.* 2. *The suffering heart finds relief in prayer.* 3. *Prayer is the first stage in the process of religious reform.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

The hopefulness of prayer. 1. When it is the cry of distress. 2. When it encourages a humble and reverential familiarity with God. 3. When it is an earnest appeal from the weak to the strong. 4. When it is based on the assurance that God knows all about our case and is willing to succour.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**The need of prayer.**

When prayer delights the least, then learn to say,
Soul, now is greatest need that thou shouldst pray.
Say what is prayer, when it is prayer indeed?
The mighty utterance of a mighty deed.
The man is praying who doth press with might
Out of his darkness into God's own light.
All things that live from God their sustenance wait,
And sun and moon are beggars at His gate."
—*Trench.*

Prayer in trouble. Sinking times are praying times with the Lord's servants. Peter neglected prayer at starting upon his adventurous journey, but when he began to sink, his danger made him a suppliant, and his cry, though late, was not too late. In our hours of bodily pain and mental anguish we find ourselves as naturally driven to prayer as the wreck is driven upon the shore by the waves. The fox hies to his hole for protection, the bird flies to the wood for shelter, and even so the tried believer hastens to the mercy-seat for

safety. Heaven's great harbour of refuge is All-prayer. Thousands of weather-beaten vessels have found a haven there, and the moment a storm comes on it is wise for us to make for it with all sail.—*Spurgeon.*

Prayer should be importunate. Prayer pulls the rope below, and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others give but an occasional pluck at the rope; but he who wins with Heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly, and pulls continuously with all his might.—*Biblical Treasury.*

God answers prayer. I once saw a grand procession in which an Oriental monarch, surrounded by a thousand life-guards, moved to the sound of all kinds of music. Some unknown subject had a request to urge. He knew the utter impossibility of ever breaking through the guards that day and night surrounded his majesty. That humble person perhaps had some dear friend in prison, who, according to Oriental custom, could never be tried or freed while the prosecutor's malice or purse held out. They have no Habeas Corpus law among nations without the Bible. This poor creature took the only possible way known to one unable to bribe the officers, and flung his petition over the heads of the guards, and it fell at the feet of the sovereign. In a moment one of the life-guards pierced it with his bayonet and flung it back into the crowd. Alas! the proud, pleasure-loving monarch, amid the luxuriant splendours of his court, palace, army, and plans of reaping renown, never so much as dreamed of noticing the prayer of that broken heart and crushed spirit. Not thus does the King of kings treat the humblest suppliant who seeks His help.—*Van Doren.*

— I never was deeply interested in any object, I never prayed sincerely and earnestly for anything, but it came; at some time, no matter how distant a day, in some shape, probably the last I should have devised, it came.—*Adoniram Judson.*

Prayer brings deliverance. Prayer procures deliverance from trouble just as Naaman's dipping himself seven times in Jordan procured him a deliverance from his leprosy; not by any virtue in itself adequate to so great an effect, you may be sure, but from this, that it was appointed by God as the condition of his recovery, and so obliged the power of Him who appointed it to give force and virtue to His own institutions beyond what the nature of the thing itself could otherwise have raised it to.—*South.*

HOMILETICS.

The Miseries of the Disinherited.

(Verses 2–5.)

I. To see their possessions enjoyed by foreigners. "Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens" (ver. 2). The land of Canaan was God's gift to the Jews. It was promised to them long before they entered into possession. There was a time when it seemed they would not be permitted even to look upon their Beulah-land. But God kept His word, and, after long wandering and many disappointments, the tribes received their allotted inheritance. In beauty and fruitfulness they found the land all that it had been represented. For many happy years they sat under their own vine and fig-tree, none daring to make them afraid. It was a bitter disappointment to find themselves violently ejected, and their loved inheritance occupied by their enemies. The possessions of earth are liable to strange and sudden changes; but the heavenly inheritance is indefeasible, and can never be wrested from the faithful.

II. To be reduced to the condition of widows and orphans. "We are orphans and fatherless; our mothers are as widows" (ver. 3). Their misery was

comparable to the sad and lonely desolation of fatherless orphans and wives just bereaved of their husbands. The guardian, guide, and support of family life is taken away, and they are left to battle with the cold, unpitying world, surrounded with heartless and cruel enemies. It is a painful experience for any family to be reduced by a single stroke from affluence to penury and friendlessness. If God did not help the widows and the fatherless, their condition would be unbearable. The competition of life is keen enough to the most favoured; but it is a terrible struggle to the lonely and friendless. The luxury of former years unfits many for the fierceness of life's conflict, and thousands go down into untimely oblivion.

III. **To be compelled to pay for the food and fuel produced on their own property.** "We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us" (ver. 4). The bitterness of the complaint is intensified in not merely that they must pay for the necessaries of life, but that it is their own property which they have to purchase. The water in their own house cisterns is taxed; the wood in their own forests must be paid for—and they paid dearly for every fagot. "The captives were doubtless closely watched, and not allowed to stray from the place where they were detained in preparation for their removal to Babylon, and thus could obtain wood and water only by paying for them" (*Speaker's Commentary*). How would they long now for the sticks their little children used to gather for the fires in which they idolatrously baked cakes for the queen of heaven! (Jer. vii. 18). It is in the hardships of life that we lament the wanton waste of more prosperous times.

IV. **To be harassed by incessant toil.** "Our necks are under persecution: we labour and have no rest" (ver. 5). We were pursued so actively that our enemies seemed ever so close upon us as to be leaning over our necks ready at once to seize us. We were tired out with being thus chased incessantly, and no opportunity was allowed us of refreshing our weary frames (*Speaker's Commentary*). Labour is necessary for health, for sustenance, for happiness. There is nothing servile in honest and necessary work, whether by hand or brain. Abraham fed his own flocks. Moses kept sheep in the desert. Paul stitched canvas tents while labouring as a pioneer among the Gentiles. The fathers of the Roman Republic ploughed their own fields, sowed the seed, and reaped their harvests with their own hands. But there is neither nobility nor pleasure in forced labour, especially in labour unrelieved by necessary rest. Life becomes one long, weary, monotonous, and depressing grind. And this is often the fate of the disinherited.

LESSONS.—1. *It is a great hardship to see our rightful inheritance violently transferred to strangers.* 2. *The loss of worldly property is not always the greatest calamity.* 3. *The truly good have an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 2–5. The sudden reverses of fortune. 1. From wealth to poverty (ver. 2). 2. From social happiness to loneliness (ver. 3). 3. From freedom to galling exactions (ver. 4). 4. From ease to excessive toil (ver. 5).

Ver. 2. Property. 1. Knows nothing of absolute ownership. 2. Is constantly changing hands. 3. Its loss by robbery and pillage a great hardship. 4. Its fickle tenure contrasts with the imperishable character of spiritual possessions.

Ver. 3. Bereavement. 1. One of the great curses of war. 2. The inevitable lot of humanity. 3. Brings pungent sorrow to somebody.

Vers. 4, 5. The loss of liberty. I. *Is painfully realised by the imposition of unjust exactions.* "We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us" (ver. 4). II. *Is followed by oppression.* "Our necks are under persecution" (ver. 5). III. *Subjects to the slavery of incessant labour.* "We labour and have no rest" (ver. 5).

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **The sadness of national decline.** "Since first the dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands —the thrones of Tyre, Venice, and England. Of the first of these great powers only the memory remains; of the second, the ruin; the third, which inherits their greatness, if it forget their example, may be led, through prouder eminence, to less pitied destruction. The exaltation, the sin, and the punishment of Tyre have been recorded for us in perhaps the most touching words ever uttered by the prophets of Israel against the cities of the stranger. Her successor, like her in perfection of beauty, though less in endurance of dominion, is still left for our beholding in the final period of her decline, a ghost upon the sands of the sea, so weak, so quiet, so bereft of all but her loveliness, that we might well doubt, as we watched her faint reflection in the mirage of the lagoon, which was the city and which the shadow."—*Ruskin.*

Bereavement has its consolations. A little boy once went out in the early morn, and was greatly delighted with the little globes formed by the dew on the brambles. He hastened back, and led his father out to see these miniature worlds; but when the father and son arrived, the sun was up, and had drawn up in vapour the globes that had hung on the brambles, and so displeased the child. The child cried, and said, "The angry sun has taken them all up." The father looked up and saw the beautiful rainbow on the bosom of the cloud, and said, "There, my child, the sun has taken up the bramble globes, and they help to form that beautiful bow on the cloud." Ah! my friends, God has taken up some of our friends, and have we not murmured? But where are they? Ah! do they not form the beautiful bow round the throne of God?

Industry secures independence. He that hath a trade hath an estate, and he that hath a calling hath an office of profit and honour; but then the trade must be worked at and the calling followed. If we are industrious, we shall never starve, for at the working man's house hunger looks in but dares not enter. Nor will the bailiff or the constable enter, for industry pays debts while despair increaseth them.—*Franklin.*

Compassion for the needy. King Oswald of Northumbria accompanied the monk Aidan in his long missionary journeys as interpreter. One day, as he feasted with the monk by his side, the thegn, a noble of his war-band, whom he had set to give alms to the poor at his gate, told him of a multitude that still waited fasting without. The king at once bade the untasted meat before him be carried to the poor, and his silver dish he divided piecemeal among them. Aidan seized the royal hand and blessed it. "May this hand," he cried, "never grow old."

Persecution defeats itself. The cruelty of Mary's reign and the lurid fires of Smithfield had only worked in Londoners a fiercer conviction of the error and falsity of the Roman Catholic religion, and when Elizabeth came to the throne, the people thronged the streets and greeted her with acclamation, as though her coming were as the rising of the sun.

— Speaking of the persecutions and martyrdoms in the time of Queen Mary, Mr. Froude says, "Every martyr's trial was a battle; every constant death was a defeat of the common enemy; and the instinctive consciousness that truth was asserting itself in suffering converted the natural emotion of horror into admiring pride."

HOMILETICS.

HUMILIATING SUBJECTION.

(Verses 6–9.)

I. Personal liberty is surrendered for a livelihood. "We have given the hand to the Egyptian and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread" (ver. 6).

Absolutely it was Babylon that had just destroyed their national existence, but Jeremiah means that all feelings of patriotism were crushed, and the sole care that remained was the selfish desire for personal preservation. To secure this the people would readily have submitted to the yoke either of Egypt or Assyria, the great powers from which in their past history they had so often suffered (*Speaker's Commentary*). Life is sweet, and it is appalling to think how many there are ready to sell their conscience, their souls, their friends, their country for bread! The sting of want demoralises the soul. It is matter for unspeakable thankfulness when men are lifted above the degrading temptations of poverty.

II. **The penalty of continuance in sin.** "Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities" (ver. 7). It is a frequent practice of the unfortunate to blame the past. Here the sufferers complain that their predecessors, who commenced the national apostasy, had died before the punishment began, and that they are left to bear alone the fatal consequences which previous transgressors had escaped. It was some time before the truth dawned upon their minds that they had adopted and continued with aggravated obstinacy the sins of their forefathers, and that there was quite sufficient guilt in their own iniquity to merit the chastisement they suffered. The course of sin is downward, ever downward, and plunges its victims into the most humiliating subjection.

III. **A painful experience to a high-spirited people when domineered over by inferiors.** "Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hands" (ver. 8). Among the things for which "the earth is disquieted and which it cannot bear," the proverb saith, "For a servant when he reigneth" (Prov. xxx. 21, 22). In Oriental countries slaves often rose to high office, and there were no doubt such in the Chaldean army. The rule of such is often maintained with unnecessary rigour. They seem to think that they can gain respect and reverence only by severity. The Jews fretted and chafed under the petty tyranny of men whom they regarded as in every respect their inferiors except in their cruel bondage. *Virgil* has said—

> "Since slaves so insolent are grown,
> What may not masters do?"

The Jews had rebelled against the wise and gentle rule of Jehovah and His servants the prophets. Now they are ruled by the tyranny of their enemies and of their slaves. The sinner cannot escape the operation of law. He only exchanges rulers.

IV. **The victims are compelled to snatch their food at the peril of their lives.** "We gat our bread at the peril of our lives, because of the sword of the wilderness" (ver. 9). Though they were willing to surrender their liberty for food, its supply was very uncertain and precarious. "This verse apparently refers to those who were left as delvers and vine-dressers in the land, and who, in gathering in such fruits as remained, were exposed to incursions of the Bedaween, here called *the sword of the desert*." Every morsel of food they ate was snatched as from the mouths of wild beasts. The next forage for food may cost them, not only their independence, but their lives. They had indeed to eat their bread with quaking and carefulness, as it had been predicted (Ezek. xii. 18, 19). There is no advantage in selling our souls for bread; it is a bad bargain. Honour is more precious than food, or than life itself.

LESSONS.—1. *War imposes great degradations on the conquered.* 2. *Sin is at the root of all humiliation and suffering.* 3. *Subjection is intolerable to those who have tasted the sweets of freedom.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 6, 8, 9. The intense love of life: 1. Tempts men to barter their freedom for food (ver. 6). 2. Subjects to the oppressive tyranny of inferiors

(ver. 8). 3. Will run great risks in the struggle for maintenance (ver. 9).

Ver. 7. **Sin and punishment**: 1. Are closely linked together. 2. The sins, like the virtues, of one generation pass on in their consequence to the next. 3. Suffering on account of others is taken into account in God's dealing with individuals and with nations. 4. Every offender is punished only according to his own sin.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Mistaken views of life.** Two old men, amateur naturalists, who had devoted their whole lives, one to ferns and the other to orchids, travelled together for many hours. At the end of their journey he who had cultivated ferns said to his companion with a sigh, "I have wasted my life: if I had it to live over again, I should devote it to orchids."

Life divinely ordered. Our life is a web woven by the hand of God, the thread reaching from our birth to our death. The woof is trouble, but still runs with it a weft of interwoven comforts.—*Adams.*

Sin in man. In man there will be a layer of fierce hyena or of timid deer running through the nature in the most uncertain and tortuous manner. Nero is sensitive to poetry and music, but not to human suffering. Marcus Aurelius is tolerant and good to all men but Christians. The Tlascalans of Mexico loved, and even worshipped flowers, but they were cruel to excess, and sacrificed human victims with savage delight. The good and the evil lie close together, the virtues and the vices alternate, so is human power accumulated; alternately the metal and the rags, a terrible voltaic pile. In the well-bred animal the claw is nicely cushioned; the old Adam is presentable.—*A. F. Russell.*

Humiliation. It is with us as with the reeds which grow by the river-side; when the waters overflow, the reed bows its head and bends down, and the flood passes over without breaking it; after which it uplifts its head and stands erect in all its vigour, rejoicing in renewed life. So is it with us; we also must sometimes be bowed down to the earth and humbled, and then arise with renewed joy and trust.

Submission. Let us not charge God over-hastily with the untoward incidents of life. In the main we are the manufacturers of our own life-material. If you give the weaver none but dark threads, he can only fashion a sombre pattern.—*Halsey.*

HOMILETICS.

THE GALLING TYRANNY OF CONQUEST.

(Verses 10–13.)

I. **There is the physical suffering occasioned by starvation.** "Our skin is black like an oven because of the terrible famine" (ver. 10). The human body can bear a great deal, but it cannot resist, nor can it survive, the ravages of famine. The bloom of health fades from the cheek, the eyes shine with an unnatural lustre, and then lose all expression; the flesh is dried and parched, the skin becomes "fiery red like an oven, because of the fever-blast" of famine, and the whole frame becomes skeletonised. During one of the famines in Ireland there was a form of face which came upon the sufferers when their state of misery was far advanced, and which was a sure signal that their last stage of misery was nearly run. The mouth would fall and seem to hang, the lips at the two ends of the mouth would be dragged down, and the lower parts of the cheeks would fall, as though they had been dragged and pulled. There were no signs of acute agony, none of the horrid symptoms of gnawing hunger. The look was one of apathy, desolation, and death. The agony of want was past. Nothing could save.

II. **Social purity is outraged.** "They humbled the women in Zion, and the maids in the city of Judah" (ver. 11). History records revolting examples of the

excesses committed by a brutal soldiery in the mad delirium of conquest. War brings in its train worse consequences than wounds and death. There is a fouler lust than the lust of military glory. The pure and unoffending are dishonoured. The sanctity of social life is invaded, and its sacred laws violated.

III. **Rank and age are treated with indignity.** "Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured" (ver. 12). See exegetical notes on this verse. It was a barbarity of ancient warfare that the conqueror paid so little regard to the feelings of the conquered. To the humiliation of defeat was added whatever could pain and degrade the vanquished. The princes of the royal blood and magistrates who had grown old in their lengthened term of office were treated with scant courtesy. The conqueror seemed to glory in parading the most illustrious of his captives under the most ignominious conditions. There were noble exceptions to this rule, but they were so rare that history has not failed to chronicle them.

IV. **Young men and children are forced into the performance of the most menial and exhausting tasks.** "They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood" (ver. 13). To grind the corn in the hand-mill was the work of female slaves. It was a great blow to the self-respect and ambition of the young men who were of legal age for military service to be condemned to this menial work. The little Jewish children, whose tender years should have been a sufficient protection against such cruelty, staggered under the loads of firewood they were compelled to carry for the Chaldean soldiers, who indulged in inhuman sport at the brave little fellows as they fell exhausted under their crushing burdens. Many of the children would be crippled for life. It is one of the praiseworthy features of nineteenth-century civilisation that so much care is shown in the protection and healthy development of child-life.

LESSONS.—1. *Woe to the people who fall into the hands of a heartless conqueror!* 2. *There are worse sufferings than the sense of being vanquished.* 3. *The tyrant conqueror has no respect for sex, or rank, or age.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 10. The sufferings of famine. 1. Apparent in their ghastly physical results. 2. Reduce all ranks to a common level. 3. Are intensified by conscious defeat and humiliation.

Vers. 11–13. **The atrocities of war.** 1. The pure and defenceless are defiled (ver. 11). 2. Princes and aged counsellors are treated with contempt and cruelty (ver. 12). 3. The spirit of the young is crushed with overpowering burdens (ver. 13).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**The cause of famine.** For unknown years the Persians have been cutting off their trees, and diminishing their rainfall thereby. Nay, not only has the removal of the forests decreased the supply, but it has wasted whatever rain fell. For the roots of the trees and of all the innumerable shrubs, bushes, vines and ferns that thrive in their shadow, kept the ground open, and held the water in countless natural wells for the use of the soil in droughts. But all the undergrowth dying when its protecting forests were felled, the scanty showers percolated into the streams at once, causing rare floods and frequent droughts. The droughts yielded no harvests, and no harvests were followed by famine, pestilence, and death.

The fascination of lust. You will go on in your lust and your sins, despite warnings, despite advice, until you perish in your guilt. How worse than children are grown-up men! The child who goes for a merry slide upon a pond, if he be told that the ice will not bear him, starts back affrighted, or, if he daringly creeps upon it, how soon he leaves it if he hears but a crack upon the slender covering of the water! But

you men have conscience, which tells you that your sins are vile, and that they will be your ruin. You hear the crack of sin as its thin sheet of pleasure gives way beneath your feet; ay! and some of you have seen your comrades sink in the flood and lost, and yet you go sliding on. Worse than childish, worse than mad, are you, thus presumptuously to play with your everlasting state.—*Spurgeon.*

Age dishonoured.

"I have lived long enough. My way of life
Is fallen into the sere and yellow leaf:
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have."—*Shakespeare.*

Helplessness appeals to our pity. Thus was the heart of the rough sailor touched when, tossing with other castaways in an open boat on the open sea, he parted with a morsel of food, which, hidden with more care than misers hide their gold, he had reserved for his own last extremity. Around him lay men and women, some dead, with glassy eyes, some dying, and these reduced to ghastly skeletons; but none of these moved him to peril his own life for theirs. The object of his noble and not unrewarded generosity—for as if Heaven had sent it on purpose to reward the act, a sail speedily hove in sight—was a gentle boy, that, with his face turned on hers, lay dying in a mother's arms, and between whose teeth the famished man put his own last precious morsel. —*Guthrie.*

The atrocities of war. I look on war with a horror which no words can express. I have long wanted patience to read of battles. The thought of man, God's immortal child, butchered by his brother, the thought of sea and land stained with human blood by human hands, of women and children buried under the ruins of besieged cities, of the resources of empires and the mighty powers of nature all turned by man's malignity into engines of torture and destruction—this thought gives to earth the semblance of hell. I shudder as among demons.—*Channing.*

HOMILETICS.

Business and Recreation.

(Verses 14, 15.)

I. **Are necessary in all organised communities.** Commercial activity and prosperity lead to a more highly organised condition of social life. To prevent the clashing and confusion of the multiplicity of interests generated by an increasing commerce, certain rules are laid down for general observance. It is only thus that law and order can be maintained. It is soon recognised that business and pleasure must be judiciously combined in order to develop a healthy and vigorous people. Incessant labour would grind down and destroy the force of the national character, and an uninterrupted round of pleasure would weaken and dissipate its enterprise and energy. The happy medium in promoting what is best in both individual and national life is found in the wise alternation of work and recreation.

"Run if you will, but try to keep your breath;
Work like a man, but don't be worked to death."

II. **Are evidences of a happy and contented people.** The gate of an Eastern city is the common rendezvous of the citizens for both business and recreation. There the venerable counsellors sit in repose and dignity to discuss and settle disputes. There the traders vend their wares. There the young life of the city expresses its exuberant joy in song and dance. Here we have a picture of prosperity, peace, and happiness. No people will be long content where there is not a thriving commerce, a reverence for law and age, ample employment and food, and the opportunity for innocent recreation.

III. Their absence a pathetic sign of general desolation. "The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music. The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning" (vers. 14, 15). The aged magistrates no longer frequent the gate, the bazaars of the merchants are deserted, the busy murmur of buying and selling is hushed, the instruments of music are laid aside unstrung, the voice of singing is no longer heard, and the spirits of the youthful dancers are crushed. Business and pleasure alike are abandoned. The joy of happier times is turned into mourning. The prophet could give no more graphic a picture of the desolation and ruin that had settled down upon the land.

LESSONS.—1. *The character and condition of a nation may be read in its commerce and recreations.* 2. *Work and play are alike necessary in the development of national life.* 3. *When the spring of enterprise is broken, a nation sinks into decay.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 14, 15. **The extinction of national life:** 1. When the wise and aged are no longer interested in public affairs. 2. When the voice of mirth is hushed. 3. When youth has lost its elasticity and hope.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **The dignity of labour.** It is time that the opprobrium of toil were done away. Ashamed of toil, art thou? Ashamed of thy dingy workshop or dusty labour-field, of thy hard hand, scarred with service more honourable than that of war, of thy soiled and weather-stained garments, on which Mother Nature has embroidered, amidst sun and rain, amidst smoke and steam, her own heraldic honours? Ashamed of these tokens and titles, and envious of the flaunting robes of imbecile idleness and vanity? It is treason to Nature, it is impiety to Heaven. Toil —toil either of the brain, of the heart, or of the hand—is true nobility.

Business not to absorb all our time. Who gave thee leave, Christian, to overlade thyself with the encumbrances of life? Is not God the Lord of thy time, as of everything else? He does indeed allow thee a fair portion for the lower employments of the body, but did He ever intend to turn Himself out of all? This is as if the sailors, who are allowed by the merchant some small adventure for themselves, should fill the ship, and leave no stowage for his goods; or as if a servant should excuse himself to his master, when reproved for neglecting his duty, by saying he could not do it because he was drunk.—*Gurnall.*

Business and religion. Piety does not retreat from business, but it seizes business, sanctifies it, and makes it sacred. If I understand religion, it is to open a shop, it is to freight ships, it is to keep accounts, it is to write up your ledgers, it is to wear an apron till it be as holy as a bishop's sleeve, and to wield a spade as responsibly and devoutly as a monarch sways a sceptre. The true characteristic of religion is to go down into everything, rise up to the highest, till, like the atmosphere, it embraces all in its beneficent and beautiful folds.—*Cumming.*

Recreation. Lute-strings sound all the sweeter for being sometimes let down; and fields sowed every year become barren. So it is with body and mind.

— A primitive Christian playing with birds vindicated his conduct by comparison with the bow, which, if constantly bent, becomes useless. Recreation is a second creation.

Pleasure itself unsatisfying. George Moore, when a wealthy man, wrote in his diary—"After this we kept a great deal of company. The house was looked upon as a work of art. All our friends expected to be invited to see it and partake of our hospitality. We accordingly gave a large dinner weekly, until we had exhausted our numerous friends and acquaintances. But happiness does not flow in such a channel. Promiscuous company takes one's mind away from God and His dealings with men; and there is no lasting pleasure in the excitement."

HOMILETICS.

THE LOSS OF HONOUR.

(Verse 16.)

I. Honour is the crown of individual character. Honour is moral rectitude, the crown and dignity of the true man.

> "Say what is honour? 'Tis the finest sense
> Of justice which the human mind can frame,
> Intent each lurking frailty to disclaim,
> And guard the way of life from all offence
> Suffered or done."—*Wordsworth.*

Moral rectitude is not a natural possession; it is the gift of Divine grace. It must be humbly and penitently sought, gratefully received, and strengthened and increased by incessant exercise. It is all of grace, and this grace sheds a glory and lustre upon the soul. As the diamond in the ring, so is grace to the soul. A heart beautified with grace has the picture of the King of heaven hung in it. It is dignified with the reflected splendour of the Divine majesty.

II. When honour is lost, man is discrowned. "The crown is fallen from our head." Israel not only lost their national king, and with him their national independence, but they lost their moral kingship, their personal righteousness; and this they lost before they were deprived of their earthly king. All that had given them rank and honour was tumbled in the dust.

> "Better to die ten thousand deaths
> Than wound my honour."
>
> "Mine honour is my life; both grow in one;
> Take honour from me, and my life is done."

III. Honour is lost when righteousness is abandoned. "Woe unto us that we have sinned." Afflicted Judah is getting clearer light. In the seventh verse they still cling to the idea that their national calamities were to be ascribed to the sins of their ancestors. Now they see the enormity of their own sins, and acknowledge that they deserved chastisement. Man is invulnerable to the assaults of the enemy and to the heaviest blows of misfortune and suffering while he retains his integrity. He is fenced round with the unconquerable protection of the God in whom he trusts. It is when he is untrue to himself, to his highest sense of honour, that he is untrue to God, and, falling away from righteousness, he becomes discrowned, and sinks into disgrace and misery.

LESSONS.—1. *Righteousness confers dignity.* 2. *That man suffers unspeakable loss who does not act up to his holiest impulses.* 3. *When a man loses a sense of honour, he may sink to any depth of infamy.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 16. **The degradation of sin:** 1. Begins in personal unfaithfulness. 2. It is undignified to sin. 3. The course of sin ends in misery and in woe.

A series of woes. "Woe unto us that we have sinned." 1. The first woe is the polluting of the soul by sin. 2. The second woe is God's hatred and abhorrence. 3. The third woe is God's leaving us. 4. The fourth woe is all kinds of punishment—an Iliad of evils. —*Bishop Ussher.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**True dignity.**

> "True dignity is never gained by place,
> And never lost when honours are withdrawn."—*Massinger.*

"Ye proud, ye selfish, ye severe,
How vain your mask of state;
The good alone have joy sincere,
The good alone are great."—*Beattie.*

Fallen greatness.

"I have ventured,
Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
This many summers in a sea of glory,
But far beyond my depth: my high-blown pride
At length broke under me; and now has left me,
Weary and old with service, to the mercy
Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me.
Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye!"
—*Wolsey.*

Degradation. That which renders men so unwilling to believe themselves capable of union with God is but the sense of their own degradation. I would gladly be informed whence this creature, who acknowledges himself so weak, obtains the right to measure and limit the Divine mercy as his own fancy suggests. Man understands so little the nature of God that he understands not himself: and yet, troubled by the contemplation of his own condition, he boldly pronounces that it is beyond the power of God to qualify him for this connection.—*Pascal.*

The agony of dishonour. The most terrible blow that General Grant ever knew was when the bank in which he was a partner had suspended payment. Not only was he ruined, his sons and daughters penniless by reason of all their savings invested in it being lost; but after a few days there came out a horrible story of craft and guile, and it was seen that his honoured name had been used to entice and decoy hosts of friends, to their own injury and Grant's discredit. Imputations were even cast on the fame that belonged to the country, and this blow was worst of all: the shock of battle was less tremendous, his physical agonies less acute.

HOMILETICS.

Religious Declension.

(Verses 17, 18.)

I. Evident in the desolation of the sanctuary. "The mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it" (ver. 18). The foxes or jackals were very likely attracted to the ruinous site of Zion by the bodies of the slain, which they devoured for food and, finding how completely the place was deserted, they remained in undisturbed possession. How different from the time when the Temple services were in full swing and the city crowded with happy worshippers! Religion is at a low ebb when the house of God is neglected and its services disregarded; it is lower still when the sanctuary is closed and its mouldering stones are covered with mosses and lichens; but it has got to the lowest depth when the building is demolished and scattered in ruins. To this pass had all the pretentious religionism of Judah now come.

II. **Is a reason for depression and sorrow.** "For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim" (ver. 17). The Jews of all ranks and classes would lament the national disasters—the loss of national honour in the fall of their king, the loss of wealth and influence, the loss of independence and liberty; but the pious Jews would lament most of all the loss of religion. They sorrowed till their hearts became faint and their eyes grew dim with tears. We may well grieve over the loss of property and friends, of worldly comforts and necessities, but the devout heart sorrows most of all over the decline of religion and the cessation of the worship of God.

III. **Should lead to much heart-searching as to its cause.** "For this—for these things—because of Zion which is desolate" (vers. 17, 18). To the Jewish mind the Temple was the residence and throne of Jehovah, the symbol of worship, the embodiment of the national religious life. The destruction of the Temple

carried with it the doom of religion: no Temple, no religion. It is true that genuine religion is independent of temples and buildings, but as a matter of fact it does not exist long without them. Individual piety may flourish without a material temple, but collective and organised religion can be maintained only by continued association and intercourse, and the sanctuary becomes a necessity of associated religious life. Those who talk so grandiosely about worshipping God in the temple of Nature rarely worship Him at all anywhere. Where there is no recognised sanctuary there is no rally-point for worshippers, and religion is disorganised and depressed. The same result ensues when the house of God is habitually neglected.

LESSONS.—1. *Religious declension is at the root of national decay.* 2. *The people of God should be always deeply concerned in religious extension.* 3. *Religious declension is sincerely lamented by the good.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 17, 18. **The disasters of the Church**: 1. Create profound concern in the hearts of the good. 2. Should be deplored by every member of the commonwealth. 3. Mean that there has been gross unfaithfulness somewhere.

Ver. 18. **A deserted sanctuary**: 1. A pathetic and suggestive sight. 2. An evidence of indifference and sin. 3. A reproach that should be promptly wiped away.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Religious declension.** The consequences which Moses foretold (Deut. xxix. 24, 25) as the result of the religious defection of the people were such as no human wisdom could foresee or experience suggest. The practice of idolatry did not prevent the aggrandisement of ancient Rome, nor any mere statesman ensure the accomplishment of a prophecy that military success should always attend the worship of the one true God, and that military discomfiture should always follow idolatry. It is evident that Moses derived his accurate knowledge of futurity from immediate inspiration of God.

Religious sham. A religion that does not take hold of the life that now is, is like a cloud that does not rain. A cloud may roll in grandeur and be an object of admiration, but if it does not rain, it is of little account so far as utility is concerned. And a religion that consists in the observance of magnificent ceremonies, but does not touch the duties of daily life, is a religion of show and of sham.

Church-going not the end of religion. I fear there are some who imagine that church-going is in itself the aim and end of all religion. No mistake can be more deplorable or pernicious. It is a blunder as egregious as it would be for a visitor to a manufactory to suppose that the machinery was all set in motion merely to be gazed at, and to keep employed the people who are engaged in tending it. The manufacturer who lays out his capital in such costly apparatus would find but an unsatisfactory return at the end of the year if there had not been a given quantity of finished goods for profitable sale in the market. So it is with church-going. It is wretched work if the worship of the house of God begins and ends with the prayers uttered there.—*Hooper.*

Mercenary religion. One of the causes that led to the overthrow of religion in Ephesus was the growing wealth attached to the Temple of Diana. The priesthood established deposit banks. Kings and private individuals intrusted their money to the care of the goddess, and the priests reinvested this for a profit. But gradually the idea of religious sanctity gave place to that of commercial enterprise, and the temple became fair game for attack and robbery.

Decay of religion. The most curious phenomenon in all Venetian history is the vitality of religion in private life, and its deadness in public policy.

Amidst the enthusiasm, chivalry, or fanaticism of the other States of Europe, Venice stands from first to last like a masked statue; her coldness impenetrable, her exertion only aroused by the touches of a secret spring. That spring was her commercial interests—this the one motive of all her important political acts or enduring national animosities. She could forgive insults to her honour, but never rivalship in her commerce. She calculated the glory of her conquests by their value, and estimated their justice by their facility. While all Europe around her was wasted by the fire of its devotion, she first calculated the highest price she could exact from its piety for the armament she furnished, and then, for the advancement of her own private interests, at once broke her faith and betrayed her religion.—*Ruskin.*

HOMILETICS.

An Earnest Prayer for Restoration.

(Verses 19–22.)

I. Acknowledges the eternal sovereignty of Jehovah. "Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever; Thy throne from generation to generation" (ver. 19). The throne of Judah is fallen, but not so the throne of God. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Israel, and all the nations of the earth may rise and fall, but God is unchanged. The fact of the perpetuity of the Divine government of the world forms the basis of a hope that, however desperate may be the condition of His people, God can restore them. If the throne of God was like the fickle governments of earth, there would be no prospect of recovery. All true prayer has the assurance of being heard and answered in the fact of the righteousness of an unchangeable God.

II. Deprecates the continued absence of the Divine favour. "Wherefore dost Thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?" (ver. 20). If Thy government is continuous, why are we forgotten and abandoned? If Thy throne in heaven is immovable, why is Thy throne in our earthly Zion overthrown? Thou didst once care for us and love us, and the memory of that happy time still keeps our hope alive. Thy favour was the joy and the sunshine of our lives; its absence is at the root of all our misery. Low as we have sunk, it cannot be that Thou hast utterly and for ever given us up. Cast us not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from us. Restore unto us the joy of Thy salvation. The soul that yearns in prayer for the Divine favour is on the brink of a glorious vision.

III. Supplicates the grace of genuine repentance. "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old" (ver. 21). Repentance is a turning about. For some time the course of Judah had been in one direction—wandering from God, and sinking into ever lower depths of sin and misery. Now there is a thoughtful pause, an arrest of the downward career. What has brought this about? Prayer; and that prayer becomes more eager and earnest as it becomes more evident that rescue is at hand. True prayer recognises that God alone can give repentance and renew the glory of the golden days of old. When the heart is changed, our outward circumstances soon alter for the better. When Judah regained the favour of God, she also regained lost temporal blessings.

IV. Is urged with the assurance that God cannot utterly reject the truly penitent. "But Thou hast utterly rejected us; Thou art very wroth against us." *Unless Thou hast utterly rejected us, unless Thou art very wroth against us.* This is stated as a virtual impossibility. Geikie translates the verse, "Thou wilt not surely wholly forget us? Thou wilt not be angry with us beyond measure?" The miserable results of their repudiation by Jehovah become the ground of a

confident appeal to Him. He heard the prayer, and at the end of seventy years the Jews were restored to their own land. The Book of Lamentations ends, as it begins, with a wail; but the concluding wail, unlike the first, has in it a joyous strain of hope. In many ancient MSS. the twenty-first verse is repeated after the twenty-second, to make a more agreeable finish when the book was read in the Synagogue: but Jeremiah did not think this arrangement necessary. He concludes with the refrain of what had been the burden of his sorrowful monologue, because he is so confident of help and restoration. "The message of God to the soul, even in threatenings, is ever in truth one of comfort." The darkest night of suffering and sorrow is followed by the tranquillising hope of the golden daybreak.

LESSONS.—1. *When the Church begins to pray there is hope of revival.* 2. *True prayer is ever accompanied with repentance.* 3. *God not only hears, but answers the prayer of the contrite.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 19, 20. **The unchangeable God.** I. *His government is in perpetual activity.* "Thou remainest for ever, Thy throne from generation to generation" (ver. 19). II. *He cannot forget His people.* "Wherefore dost Thou forget us for ever?" (ver. 20). III. *He will not for ever stand aloof from His people.* "Wherefore dost Thou forsake us for so long time?" (ver. 20).

Vers. 21, 22. **A prayer for repentance.** I. *Recognises that repentance is a Divine act.* "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord; renew our days as of old" (ver. 21). II. *When God gives repentance it is effectual.* "And we shall be turned" (ver. 21). III. *When God gives repentance it is evident His wrath is withdrawn, and He again accepts us.* "Unless Thou hast utterly rejected us; unless Thou art very wroth against us" (ver. 22). But this cannot be, for He gives repentance. He "renews our days as of old."

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**The eternity of God.** Would you gain some idea of the eternity past of God's existence? Go to the astronomer and bid him lead you with him in one of his walks through space; and as he sweeps outward from object to object, from universe to universe, remember that the light from those filmy stains on the deep pure blue of heaven now falling on your eye has been travelling space for a million of years.—*Mitchell.*

Prayer the melody of misery.

"Oh, hearts that break and give no sign,
Save whitening lip and fading tresses,
Till death pours out his cordial wine,
Slow-dropped from misery's crushing presses:
If singing breath or echoing chord
To every hidden pain were given,
What endless melodies were poured,
As sad as earth, as sweet as heaven!"
—*O. W. Holmes.*

Suffering prompts prayer. Afflictions make us most frequent and fervent in pouring forth our supplications unto God. In our prosperity we either utterly neglect this duty, or perform it carelessly and slothfully; but when we are brought into calamities, we flee to Him by earnest prayer, craving His aid and help. And as the child, fearing nothing, is so fond of his play that he strays and wanders from his mother, not so much as thinking of her, but if he be scared or frighted with the sight or apprehension of some apparent or approaching danger, presently runs to her, casts himself into her arms, and cries out to be saved and shielded by her, so we, securely enjoying the childish sports of worldly prosperity, do so fondly dote on them that we scarce think of our Heavenly Father; but when perils approach and are ready to seize upon us, then we flee to Him and cast ourselves into the arms of His protection, crying to Him by earnest prayer for help in our extremity.—*Downame.*

The value of prayer. If the whole

world in which we live is but a continual temptation, if all around appears to agree with our inward corruptions to weaken and seduce us, if riches bribe and indigence sours, if prosperity elevates and afflictions abase us, if business dissipates and rest enervates us, if the sciences exalt and ignorance bewilders us, if commerce exposes us too much and solitude leaves us too much to ourselves, if pleasure seduce us and holy works make us proud, if health awakens the passions and sickness produces murmurings—in a word, if since the fall of man all that surrounds us and all that is in us is perilous, in so deplorable a situation, O my God, what hope of salvation remains for us? If our sighs do not incessantly ascend from the depth of our misery towards the throne of Thy mercy until Thou deignest to assist us and to rescue us from our fallen state.—*Massillon.*

God answers prayer. When poor men make requests to us, we usually answer them as the echo does the voice—the answer cuts off half the petition. We shall seldom find among men Jael's courtesy, giving milk to those that ask water, except it be as this was, an entangling benefit, the better to introduce a mischief. There are not many Naamans among us that, when you beg of them one talent, will force you to take two. But God's answer to our prayers is like a multiplying glass, which renders the request much greater in the answer than it was in the prayer.—*Bishop Reynolds.*

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than the world dreams of."
—*Tennyson*

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HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET

EZEKIEL.

CHAPTERS I.—XI.

By the REV. D. G. WATT, M.A.

CHAPTERS XII.—XXIX.

By the REV. T. H. LEALE.

CHAPTERS XXX.—XLVIII.

By the REV. GEO. BARLOW.

Printed in the United States

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
NEW YORK AND LONDON

PREFACE

THIS Commentary is the work of three different authors. The portion chapters i.-xi. is written by the Rev. D. G. WATT, M.A.; xii.-xxix. by the Rev. T. H. LEALE; xxx.-xlviii. by the Rev. G. BARLOW.

The *Exegetical Notes* contain, in a condensed form, the results of recent Biblical criticism, and will be found a valuable help in the interpretation of the text and in furnishing facts of contemporaneous history to elucidate the prophecies. The Vision of the Temple (chapters xl.-xlviii.) is treated in its ideal aspect, and, viewed in this light, it becomes full of suggestiveness to the practised homilete.

Every available work on this confessedly difficult book has been diligently consulted, and the choicest and most helpful passages of the best authors are condensed in the body of this Commentary. Of the 390 *Homiletic Outlines* all are original, except those which bear the names of their respective authors.

Among other works, the following writers on the Prophecies of Ezekiel have been carefully scanned:—W. Greenhill, E. Henderson, Patrick Fairbairn, Hengstenberg, Keil, M'Farlan, Archbishop Newcombe, Bishop Horsley, Dean Stanley, Kitto, Dr. Frazer's "Synoptical Lectures," Geikie's "Hours with the Bible," Pool's "Annotations," Lightfoot on "The Temple," F. D. Maurice's "Prophets and Kings," Guthrie's "Gospel in Ezekiel," and the following Commentaries—The Speaker's, Lange's, A. Clarke's, Benson's, Sutcliffe's, Matthew Henry's, Trapp's, and Fausset's.

Amid the wealth of imagery in the use of which Ezekiel is so lavish, and the dry facts of history, the aim throughout has been to detect and develop the great moral truths of which the thoughtful sermoniser is in constant search in his anxious study of the Word of God.

G. B.

SHEFFIELD, *August* 1890.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

BOOK OF EZEKIEL.

INTRODUCTION

No prophetical book sets the writer, the dates, the places of its contents so distinctly forth as that of Ezekiel does. It is not only a record of what the Lord spoke by His prophet, it is also a record of personal experiences during the period in which he was an organ for special divine impulses. The one is as instructive as the other.

The book shows that Ezekiel was the child of a priestly family, and had been taken into captivity when the king of Babylon carried away the wealth, the strength, the skilled industry of Jerusalem. No direct information is communicated as to his life before the captivity, or as to the first five years of his enforced exile. We cannot say that he had ever officiated as a priest in the Temple of Jerusalem, though his movements show apparent familiarity with its compartments (chap. viii.). He was one of a colony of his fellow-exiles who had been settled—why, he does not say—by the Chebar, somewhere among "the rivers of Babylon," and had established a characteristic organisation for themselves. "The elders" once and again took counsel with Ezekiel in his own house; for he was a householder and married to a woman whom he warmly loved. He starts his narration from the fifth day of the fourth month of the fifth year, when the distinguished episode in his life, by which he became known, was commenced with his first vision of God.

That revelation affected his constitution in a remarkable manner. Mental conditions, of course, would be altered thereby; but bodily affections were still more palpably influenced. The sensation of eating the roll of writing, of being lifted up and carried away, of the strong hand of the Lord laid upon him; the sitting "astonished"—stunned—seven days, the lengthened duress, the loss of power of speech, except when authorised by the Lord to utter His messages, and other physical phenomena, betoken at once the action of God and of a disorder in Ezekiel's health. Perhaps his nervous system was one of that highly sensitive kind whose conditions under excitement cannot be foreseen; and that it should have been upset could not be regarded as an unlikely thing. God's instruments are not always such as man would employ. He chose, for an apostle, Paul, whose "bodily presence was weak;" is it impossible that He would choose, for a prophet, a man of a peculiarly nervous temperament? If

the "abundance of revelations" given to the former affected his bodily frame, why should similar revelations not have affected Ezekiel's physical constitution?

The symptoms did not disappear at once. Though he had recovered the power of walking (xii. 3–7), yet the statement that the elders were accustomed to go to his house to hear his words (viii. 1, xiv. 1, xx. 1), indicates that weakness and physical disability clung to him for a considerable time—perhaps to the tenth month of the ninth year (xxiv. 1). At that date he was confronted with something more than physical ailment. He endured the chastisement whereof all sons are partakers, and learned how "deep calleth unto deep" as they cross the sea of life. The wife whom his eyes liked to rest upon was cast down at his side by a sudden stroke. No open cry of anguish broke from his lips. Every sign of sorrow and mourning was sternly repressed; yet the pathetic reference to what she had been to him suffices to prove how hard it must have been to say "Thy will be done."

Under the dark shadow of this sad event his last prophecy concerning the state of undestroyed Jerusalem was uttered. Then for about three years he remained dumb, as if his bereavement had aggravated his previous disordered bodily symptoms. Only when the first part of his commission was fulfilled, when his position, as the sign of troubles impending over the Holy City, was no longer tenable, the turning-point of his affliction was reached. The news of the capture of Jerusalem became the signal for recovery of the free use of his organs of speech (xxxiii. 22), and no mention is made of any bodily infirmities when executing the second part of his commission. Thus he passes from view. Like Moses, like prophets and apostles, "he was buried, and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." Is this significant of a principle of the divine government, intimating that true conduct not outward appearances, that life not death, are to be perpetuated in the thoughts of men?

Ezekiel was profoundly conscious of the dates when he spoke by the Spirit, and might be said to keep a journal of them. For him "inspiration" was not merely an ecstasy of his own mind. From the fifth to the twenty-seventh year of his residence in Chaldea he knew that he was an organ which the Lord used to sound forth the notes of judgment and mercy.

The sphere of his prophetic activity was not only the captives, but also the Jews still remaining in Judea. Between the two portions there was no cordiality, and we might fancy that the property of the exiles had been somewhat dishonestly or forcibly appropriated by the others (xi. 15). The task of Ezekiel was hard. He saw that both divisions were oppressed and depressed, and open to the glitter of flattering prospects presented by unworthy men. He had to dispel vivid illusions, to expose clamant evils, to render patient under the hard facts of punishment, to urge unpalatable truths which were no more agreeable to them than to other people. More than other prophets he was ordered to watch for souls; more than to others the modelling of the future Israel was intrusted to him. The last fortress of Judaism as it had been is to be trodden under the feet of the heathen, but out of its ruins a new one is to be raised, and he has to make a sketch of it. More magnificent and moving symbols of the glory of the Lord than had been given in the Temple of Jerusalem came to the exile by the Chebar, and testified that He could preserve there a people for Himself. His gifts and calling are without repentance, yet he means to

bring the people to perceive their unfaithfulness, that they had to do with the living God, that the eternal holiness is unchangeable, and that each soul is responsible for its own sins. Buried seed does not rot though ungenial weather may prevent it sprouting for many a day, and out of this period of banishment were to spring forces for the creation of a new Judaism to which idols and idol-worship would be altogether abhorrent. A new theocracy would be constituted, and Ezekiel is the pioneer of this new phase of divine education. He "was to point to an inauguration of divine worship far more solemn than was to be secured by the reconstruction of the city or Temple on its original site in its original form; to point, in fact, to that dispensation which Temple, city, and nation were intended to foreshadow and introduce" (*Speaker's Com.*). Thus was he given one of the highest places among the men of the Old Testament. It is not absurd to make a comparison between Moses and this prophet. Moses had visions of God and instructed the tribes of Israel to build a sanctuary according to the pattern shown to him; he gave details of the services to be rendered therein; he set before the congregation life and death; "he heard the voice of One speaking unto him from off the mercy-seat, . . . from between the two cherubims." Did not Ezekiel hear a voice from above the cherubim? Did he not stand between the people and the Lord? Did he not prepare them to sanctify God, and so to be fitted for the future position they were to occupy in their own land and before all nations? Did he not appear like a lawgiver, who, in chaps. xl.–xlviii., was authorised to prescribe Temple and worship for future times, and so place the crown upon his prophetic service?

The manner in which he carried out his service is instructive and stimulating. All his faculties are put at the call of the Lord—his eyes, ears, feet, tongue. He sets forth plainly and amply that which he has been inspired to do and teach. He goes on to the appointed duty, unheeding what its consequences to himself may be. He will bear any burden, expose himself to any risks, confront any fear or the dislike and hatred of his own people, if thus he may promote their welfare or be exculpated from their woe. If his forehead is "as an adamant, harder than flint," it is not from indifference to the moral conduct and disastrous fate of his countrymen, it is from a burning wish that the divine word should find a faithful and adequate representation (iii. 9, 10). He is "a spiritual Samson," "of undaunted and audacious courage," one of

> "The dead, but sceptered sovereigns, who still rule
> Our spirits from their urns."

There is another side of his service. He is the most practical of prophets; he can cook, draw, dig, calculate, and measure. He is not a recluse; he sits among his captive countrymen for days and freely receives them into his house. He is informed as to the history and state of his own nation, and as to the religions, the politics, the trade of other nations too. Had he watched the sea and its sailors; looked upon the many articles of commerce that were found in the busy marts of ancient Tyre? Each of his features assures us that he was fitted to point the way into a new position in which men should be required to reconsider and rearrange the practice of their forefathers.

The style of Ezekiel is clear enough on the whole. At times "a sublimity,

tenderness, beauty, melody wholly his own" distinguish it. "Strange combinations and grotesque forms are resorted to, when by means of them he can add to the graphic power and moral force of his delineations, and invest his imagery with such specific and minute details as are naturally connected with a felt and present reality" (*Fairbairn*). The stir and pomp of Babylonian life are within his scope, and some of its colossal symbolic figures, which have been unearthed to the wonder of our generation, show how his thoughts had been coloured. His parables, proverbs, pictures are all used to present and impress the truths he had to deliver, and in this view he freely repeats himself, so as to produce sometimes the feeling that he is too prolix. (Comp. chap. i. with viii.–xi.; iii. 16–21 with xxxiii. 1–9; vi. with xxxvi.; xvi. with xxii. and xxiii.; xviii. with xxxiii. 10–20.) He has favourite and peculiar expressions: "The word of the Lord came," "The hand of the Lord was upon me," "Thou son of man," "Thus saith the Lord God;" and a tendency to sum up with, "So shall ye, or they, know that I am the Lord." Individuality and unity mark his whole work, and help us to perceive what he was whom the Lord moulded into a vessel fit for that juncture of affairs in which he lived and acted as a spiritual force.

A considerable likeness of phraseology is to be noticed between Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and is an indication, not that one borrowed from the other, but that a similar mission had made for itself a similar verbal garment. A much more remarkable parallelism, however, is found between Lev. xvii.–xxvi. and the early portion of Ezekiel's prophecies. To account for this by saying that Ezekiel wrote both, or that some scamp interpolated Ezekiel's words into the book of the law in order to give the former or the latter a factitious authority, is an explanation quite worthy of those who can tell to a line what Isaiah wrote or did not write; or who can clear out of the Four Gospels the many words which Jesus of Nazareth did not speak, and actions which He did not do! I have no skill for such legerdemain. I can do no more than suppose that Ezekiel had so closely studied the condition of affairs described in Leviticus that he, perhaps unconsciously, adopted its expressions in reference to a rebellious and gainsaying people.

Scanty justice has been meted out to Ezekiel and his work. Not only was he treated harshly at the outset of his prophesying, but the Jews of later times, we are told, at the last revision of the Hebrew canon, disputed as to whether the Book of Ezekiel should be included therein, and in after-days forbad that it should be read until thirty years of age had been passed. If it has not fared quite so badly among Christians, yet Jerome, 1500 years ago, applied epithets to it which are re-echoed by unnumbered commentators, and do not encourage its study—*Scripturarum oceanus et mysteriorum Dei labyrinthus.* A certain class of moderns are still less respectful, and therefore less likely than Jerome to find the spiritual power of the prophet. Preachers of our day say that they have never taken a text out of it, or but three or four times during the course of a lengthened ministry. Reuss suggests, as a ground for this neglect, that "Christian commentators have found less in him than in others of what they sought for, viz., Hebrew texts, direct relations, true or pretended, with the facts and ideas of the gospel." Still there are testimonies of another kind. Hengstenberg writes, "Whoever penetrates into Ezekiel will be deeply stirred

by his earnestness, and . . . if it please God to bring great sifting judgments upon us, to pull down what He has built up, and to root out what He has planted, we may gain from him an immovable confidence in the final victory of the kingdom of God, who kills and makes alive, who wounds and heals, and who, after He has sent the darkest cloud, at length remembers His covenant and displays His shining bow." "What things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through comfort and patience of the Scriptures might have hope."

The book is divided into two halves, which have striking parallelisms with one another. In the first the carnal confidence of Israel in Jerusalem is buried, in the second a new Temple is built up. The first part embraces chaps. i.–xxiv., and treats of the obstinate wickedness of the people and the approaching overthrow of Jerusalem. The second part embraces chaps. xxxiii.–xlviii., and treats of the new life to the people and the future modified Temple and its worship. Between these two parts stand chaps. xxv.–xxxii., which treat of seven neighbouring heathen peoples. They are warned of the righteous judgment of God against them, and their number, seven, probably conveys the intimation that the principles applied to them are applicable to all the ungodly nations.

THE PROPHECIES OF EZEKIEL.

FIRST MAIN DIVISION.

CHAPTERS I.–XXIV.

I.—THE DIVINE CALL OF EZEKIEL. CHAPS I.–III. 15.

1. THE DESIGNATION OF THE PROPHET TO HIS WORK (Chap. i. 1–3).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. "Now," the usual Hebrew connective particle, united to a tense which signifies an action associated with something which has already transpired. It seems to have place here, neither because the Book of Ezekiel is a continuation of that of Jeremiah, nor because a preceding portion of Ezekiel's prophecies has been lost, but rather because of thoughts which were in the mind of the writer, and in succession to which his call came. "In the thirtieth year." No note is given to define the point from which this date takes its origin. It was the thirtieth from the last jubilee year, or from the finding of the Book of the Law in the reign of King Josiah (2 Kings xxii. 8), or from the era fixed by the father of Nebuchadnezzar as the commencement of the Chaldean dominion, or from the birth of the prophet—such are the suggestions made by various expositors. The first and the last are the most improbable; still, it would be misapplied labour to discuss whether the third or the fourth is the more likely. There is no part of the prophecies depending for illustration upon a settlement of the point from which Ezekiel reckons. No doubt it had some bearing upon him and his contemporaries; it seems to have none upon us. "In the fourth"—*month* is omitted in the Hebrew, as frequently with Ezekiel. The fourth month of the ecclesiastical year corresponds to our June–July, when nature is prolific with storms. "In the

fifth day of the month"—was this a Sabbath? So it has been affirmed because *seven days* after he received a further commission (iii. 16). This is too precarious a footing from which to trace a parallel to the case of the banished John (Rev. i. 10). "As I was among the captives"—literally, "*and I in the midst of the captivity.*" He has not yet mentioned who he is, so by this silence he calls special attention to his environment. He sets forth that he was amongst, and was one of those Jews who had been carried away from their ancestral land, and subjected to the shame and pain of captivity. He was a troubled man along with other troubled men. Not that he was under enforced servile labour, as the Israelites were in Egypt, "the house of bondage;" he had a considerable amount of personal liberty; but he was far from the land of promise, and oppressed with a sense of his exile. "By the river of Chebar." It is not at all certain to-day where this river was. It is not necessary to suppose that Ezekiel was beside it, because the murmur of the water might dispose to quietude, and prepare his mind for openness to God. Something less sentimental than that took him thither. He had been located in the district, through which the water flowed, by the paramount power as a district which could be easily superintended, and in which there was need of population. Such wars as Nebuchadnezzar carried on, like the wars which modern Turks have waged, could not but have been the occasion for large parts of his dominions to fall out of cultivation. It would be politic to settle an industrial people like the Jews in such places, and grant them full permission "to build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them." Abundance of water was needed for such operations. So the captive Jews were by a river. All was not pleasant there. Just as the later Jews were confined to the slums of Rome on the right bank of the Tiber, and satirised as *Transtiberini*, so was scorn heaped upon the earlier captives by "the rivers of Babylon." There they were teased and tormented. "They that carried us away captive required of us a song, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion." A somewhat truculent temper was engendered; but God did not forsake them, and even there did exceeding abundantly above what they thought. "The heavens were opened." The exile perceived the sky cleft open. Perhaps it was not materially so, but only to the eye of faith. Yet as he speaks of it as an actual fact, it is preferable to consider the appearance to have been shown to "eyes open," as was that to John the Baptist, to Stephen, to Peter. "I saw visions of God"—phenomena produced by God and relating to His Godhead; He was at once the author and the object of them. They were somewhat differently presented from those which Ezekiel received afterwards, which were "*in* visions" (chaps. viii. 3, xi. 24, xl. 2).

Ver. 2. "The fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity." Jehoiachin had been placed on the throne of Judea b Nebuchadnezzar; but, following advice from the partisans of an Egyptian alliance, and in defiance of the protestations and threatenings of Jeremiah, he had pursued a procedure at variance with the interests of the Babylonian empire. Nebuchadnezzar soon trampled down the feeble revolt, and, in little more than three months of kingship, Jehoiachin was made captive and carried away to Babylon with the prophetic denunciation ringing in his ears that he would "die childless"—the last of the line of David which was traced through Solomon. His captivity was rigorous for years. He was kept in confinement and clothed in prison garments, and that, with their own troubles, must have made the thousands of Jews who had been transported with him to regard the date of their exile as deeply significant. So Ezekiel says to them—his contemporaries and hearers—that four years of their captivity had gone by, and then he was made cognisant of manifestations of God. This mode of dating he adheres to in his succeeding prophecies, never again referring to the thirtieth year of verse 1.

Ver. 3. "The word of the Lord." Appearances were fortified, as so often

in God's revelations, by words heard. "**Came expressly.**" Ezekiel uses here a form of Hebrew emphasis, *i.e.*, repeating the same verb. Such a repetition, in this connection, can scarcely mean that the word came directly to him, but rather that it was certainly, verily, really a divine word which in "coming came to him." It needed a special attestation, and that was given to it. The same authenticating feature is exhibited in the frequent reiterations and assertions by Ezekiel that he was acting under divine impulse and authority. "**Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi.**" The order in the Hebrew, is, "Ezekiel, the son of Buzi the priest." Of course Ezekiel was a priest by descent; but this order of the Hebrew may be intended to signify that, being in captivity, he had never fulfilled any specific priestly functions. His name, as usual among the Jews, has a meaning, and is to be translated either "God is strong," or "God will strengthen." Hengstenberg decides for the former, and says it is to be explained that "Ezekiel was he in relation to whom God is strong." Baumgarten chooses the latter, and says it signifies "he whose character is a special confirmation of the strength of God." The idea insisted on by Hengstenberg, following an older commentator, that it "is not a name he had borne from his youth, but an official name which he had assumed at the beginning of his calling," appears to be groundless. It is true of all the prophets, both that God is strong to fulfil His purpose, and that He will give strength to His servants for that part of His work which He has assigned them. "**In the land of the Chaldeans.**" This topographical addition seems to be intended for a further attestation that it was the word of the Lord which really came to Ezekiel. The Chaldee version interpolates thus, "In the land [of Israel, and again a second time He spake to him in the land] of the Chaldeans." It is believed that "the Jews had a notion that the Shechinah could not overshadow a prophet out of the Holy Land." Perhaps a strain of this notion is to be heard in the wail of the captives "by the rivers of Babylon" when they ask, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" The notion was to be eradicated. God could endue a man with prophetic power even in Chaldea, and that is further witnessed to by the words "*was there upon him.*" "**The hand of the Lord**" is a frequent Scriptural expression, and indicates that the thing which was to be done was done in submission to the restraining or the impelling energy of the Lord.

HOMILETICS.

(1.) General Conditions of the Designation.

I. The time to receive fuller knowledge of the Lord is uncertain. Who can tell why the call to Ezekiel came in the fifth year, and not in the first, second, &c.? The pain and pressure of exile galled, no doubt, as deeply in the earlier years as in the later, yet Ezekiel had not seen "the heavens opened." *What is uncertain to men is fixed with God.* He is "the only wise God." He sees the end from the beginning of all lives. He alone knows where it is best to lead "the brook" across the way of His people, by drinking of which they "will lift up their heads." *Though uncertain, men are not to be unconcerned.* Having no criterion as to the appropriate time for special unfolding of the will of God, that does not sanction an utter indifference as to what they would have Him do. They must "wait on the Lord and keep His way," ever hoping that He will "exalt" them to see what they do not yet see of the glorious majesty of His kingdom. *Though uncertain, men should always be on the alert.* Waiting for blessing is not real and valid waiting, except they who wait are sensitive to the approach of the Lord. His word comes to comfort, strengthen, open up a duty, and those are the good and faithful servants who honour Him by receiving it, no matter at what time, convenient or inconvenient to them, He may vouchsafe it. *Though uncertain men must never*

lose faith. However long it be ere a word comes—one year or five years—they must believe in God. He has not forgotten His people. Let them trust that in some month He will bestow favour on them and His depressed interests.

II. **The place is undistinguished.** *It has no memorable associations.* The land of the Chaldeans was devoid of that instructive relation to the Jews which both Egypt and the mountains of Sinai had. The river of Chebar could not stir their thoughts as the Jordan could. But God can produce in an obscure or obnoxious place that which will be a hallowed memory. He can make communications in a garden as to Adam, in an outlying district of Luz as to Jacob, in a cave of the desert as to Elijah, in exile as to Ezekiel. He may manifest Himself anywhere—in ship or customhouse, by road or rail, in a family or alone. *It has no recognised religious privileges.* The captives could not make yearly pilgrimages to the City of the Great King; they could not approach to the place where His honour dwelt. For them there was no treading of His courts, no appearing before Him, no burnt-offerings and sacrifices to offer for His acceptance. Their hearts might thirst and faint for His altars, but they could not be relieved. As Nathanael in after times, they might have put a question expressive of contempt and unbelief, Can any good thing be obtained by the rivers of Babylon? They had not yet learned by experience that the Lord would make "a little sanctuary" for them in the place to which He had driven them, and there reveal His justice and His grace. So when Ezekiel was constituted an organ of new revelations, they were blessed where they did not look for blessing. Happy is it that the help of God is for the feeble who cannot, for the charged with duty who must not, for the wanderers who may not enter into the assemblies of worshippers, as well as for those who have all means of grace at their command. "In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

III. **The person is inconspicuous.** So far as is known, there was nothing to give prominence to Ezekiel over other members of priestly families, or the general body of his fellow-captives. "There is no respect of persons with God." He does not limit His manifestations by any classifications which men may make. "Base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen." The boy with a good education or the boy without it, children who are taught by their parents the truth in Jesus from their earliest days, or children who have learned no more than they learned in a Sunday-school, may equally obtain from God an entrance into "the secret of His covenant."

This designation of Ezekiel furthermore suggests—*God can provide fit agents in unexpected circumstances.* He only knows when and where it is required that He should make special additions to men's knowledge of Him and His ways, and He has the wisdom and the power to select the persons to whom that knowledge can be given. So He finds Enoch amid gigantic iniquities, Moses in the palace of Pharaoh, Ezekiel among the captives of Babylon, Paul (Saul) among the fiercest of persecutors, Luther in a monastery. Lowly places or prominent places cannot be obstacles in His path of goodness and mercy. He proves that "His strength is made perfect in weakness."

God can bestow great boons on the person He may call. An exile amongst exiles, with none of the appointed external means of worship, in the face of political disabilities, pressed upon by social troubles, allied to men who had no heart to help him, yet Ezekiel not only found God near, but, moreover, saw heavenly things, and was touched by a hand which made him one of the forces of the world. It tells us that not any circumstances of life, not any conditions of body need to prevent us from being dignified by a faith in the unseen, and sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

God can increase His servant's power by connecting him with an organisation. Robinson Crusoe, alone on Juan Fernandez, might have received large favours from

God, but he could not use those favours for the welfare of neighbours. Power with men depends more or less upon the links which bind us to them. There is influence from *a family*. When the solitary are set in families it is that they may give and find help which could not have been otherwise secured. Each member has a power to affect the rest who are within the same circle. There is influence from *a caste*. Commercial, social, intellectual, religious interests bind men to one another, and that bond enables them to carry out schemes which could not have been accomplished individually, *e.g.*, guilds, trades' unions, companies, an aristocracy, an army, a priesthood, a denomination of Christians. There is influence from *a nation*. The members of a small nation are not so powerfully backed as those of a large. *Civis Romanus sum* was a phrase which gave, to the person who could employ it, greater consideration and security than were given to the citizens of any other state contemporary with the Roman. The phrase, "I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews,"—however the speaker of it might have been counted as "the offscouring of all things,"—was pregnant with mightier influences than have been wielded by the nationalities of those who derided him. The use of a nation's influence cannot be indifferent to God who loveth righteousness; and in Ezekiel He designated a man who had received a certain education and status on account of his priestly origin, and who, because he was a Jew and could contribute to Hebrew literature, has obtained a position which commands the suffrages of the world. "This also is of the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Organisations may be hurtful by checking the fair development of personal life, but they can also add to personal power.

(2.) Preliminary Steps to the Designation.

I. "Ezekiel, the son of Buzi the priest" (ver. 3).

It is sometimes argued that Ezekiel was trammelled by his connection with the priestly organisation, that his lineage induced him to weave a sacerdotal element into his prophecies, that he presents "a Levitical turn of mind, in virtue of which he sets a high value upon sacred customs." Attempts to prove this do not appear eminently successful. When commentators say that his sacerdotalism is shown in the demands he makes for obedience to the requisitions of the Law, we seem to hear in that statement, not a simple reading of the prophecies, but a reading with interpolations from fancy or prepossession. Isaiah, Jeremiah make the same demands, and, taking account of the different circumstances of Ezekiel, he exhibits no more of a sacerdotal tendency than they do. It would have been an odd place in which to manifest "a genuine priestly turn of mind"—whatever that may mean—the place where he could not by any means fulfil the special functions of the priesthood; but a very suitable place in which to endeavour to impress the captives with the conviction that they were still "under the law to God," even though far from the Temple of Jehovah. It would be as hard to signify where Ezekiel exhibits "a strong priestly feeling," marking him off from other prophets, as it would be to exhibit a strong pastoral and fruit-gathering feeling in Amos (chap. vii. 14). Yet Fairbairn writes, "In Ezekiel alone of the later prophets does the priestly element become so peculiarly prominent and prevailing as to give a tone and impress to the general character of his ministrations, and to render even his prophetical labours a kind of priestly service" (p. 8). We see—what we expect to see! God chooses prophets not to unfold their own ancestral or technical habits, but His true and broad righteousness and love. That Ezekiel, when acting in accordance with this, should employ imagery borrowed from the Law and worship of Israel was natural. He did it, however, not as one who would exalt whatever the priests had to carry out, but as one who had been taught that against the degrading tendencies of Israel there was no barrier, against heathenism there was no power, in Temple, offerings, or priests. He was taught that there was no preservative in the evil days of dire captivity save in the latent energy and intrinsic truth of "the

lively oracles" given by Moses. So he sets himself, not to do a service for priestliness, but for the Law. As a priest he was doubtless one of that kind whose lips kept knowledge, and as an enforcer of the Law was "the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal. ii. 7).

II. "Now I was among the captives" (ver. 1).

Ezekiel had been, apparently, by himself. His mind had been exercised upon the sad days that were passing over him and his people. He had been laying himself open to thoughts of the Lord, and then he was called into a nearer communion than he had ever experienced. Unconsciously he was stepping forward to receive competency to do actions for God. He does not tell how he had been moving—only that, while so employed, "it came to pass" that God spoke to him. They who would learn of Christ must: 1. *Go alone with Him.* Things pass in secret from Him which no stranger need intermeddle with, and no personal insufficiency need intercept. 2. *Go with all cares.* Outer circumstances may be harassing, associates may be lukewarm or ungodly, prospects may seem utterly blank, but neither ignore them nor make light of them before Him, for "He careth for you." 3. *Go in hope that He will manifest Himself.* Unlooked-for light may be lifted up on you, strength may be infused, faith be increased, and new scenes in your history be entered on; for "He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond what you think."

III. "The heavens were opened" (ver. 1).

1. *Men have faculties for realising what is beyond the earth.* We dwell on the borders of the unknown, and can take interest in noticing the traces of what may be therein. God's hands have made us and fashioned us so that this is possible. To use only animal functions, to develop only earthly aims, and to present a mutilated nature to all the influences which play upon us, is a spectacle darkened with criminality in reference to ourselves and our Maker. But to use our faculties for looking at "the things unseen and eternal," that is the part of full and true manhood—a token that our life is a life worth living.

2. *God adopts methods for acting on those faculties.* As light is made to suit the organ of sight, and sound the organ of hearing, so His Spirit is able to operate upon us in order that we may discern spiritual things. The person who sees light or hears a sound cannot prove to another person that he sees or hears. He can only affirm, witness. So a person, who has "the eyes of his heart enlightened to know" what is his inheritance in the heavens, cannot give any demonstration of the change which he is conscious of, he can only affirm, witness, that he does know what he did not know. "Whereas I was blind, now I see," is as applicable to heavenly as to earthly things. All men do not receive the benefit of God's methods. Some deny their operation, and some their validity. Some acknowledge them only to neglect them, and some hope that they will see the heavens opened though they do not go to the only door thereinto. But whatever the reason be for their deficiency, the light has been opened up to the world, and men are judged for not believing in it. The Son of God has come from heaven and has again ascended to His Father: through Him heaven is always open, and open to every one who will. "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."

IV. "I saw visions of God" (ver. 1).

More is meant than that Ezekiel saw grand and vast visions. His expression is not to be limited to visions given by the action of God, or to visions notifying the will of God, but embraces also the marvellousness of revelations of God. He was made a seer of God in order to be a prophet for God. Observe—

1. *Thoughts of heaven must receive their character from views of God.* If we could see into heaven and did not see signs of God there, we should remain in spiritual darkness. We must pass into the house to perceive the householder. We are vagrants still, as to all moral progress and undertakings, if we do not find ONE who can enlighten and guide and strengthen us. All beliefs of our interest in

the heavens will be blighted unless they are steps on our way to know we have a living, almighty, perfect Friend.

2. *All true views of God are given by God.* "He dwelleth in light, which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see." Human power cannot make Him manifest Himself. The highest knowledge which men of themselves can reach does not embrace one of the secrets of His being. He alone opens the inward eyes and presents the aspects He wants to reveal. He may open them through some outward impulse, or by action on the heart, but in either case the ripple of sensational life is hushed by the flow of a grander life, and the reasoning faculty stands still, waiting to know what it shall receive. Then, as the light air comes to a hanging leaf and stirs it, as a father's love and wisdom come to an erring child and prompt to confession, so the subject of visions of God knows that God has affected him—that God alone could accomplish that which has happened to him. The visions are real. The prophet did see some appearances of God; and, whether it were by an external operation or by his own inward rapt attention, he was prepared to avouch it as confidently as he would a vision obvious merely to his physical sight. How many He gives! Is there a week, a day passing in which He does not set forth something of His glory?

3. *Visions of God require a conscious apprehension by men.* Men can look upwards or downwards, outward or inward: but they may shut their eyes. So they decide whether they will see the things of God or not—whether they will accept the fuller manifestations of God or not. And the bowed in heart, the seeker for the truth learns that, back of the material world and its forces, is He whom they all obey, and whom hearts should believe in. They yield themselves up, not by the push of a blind necessity, but according to the laws of their own freedom, and yet they are elevated, guarded, and assured of the reality of their visions by the supreme Spirit operating.

4. *Various aspects of God are presented.* No man can see God, and all that is perceived by the most favoured seer is but the back parts of His goodness and glory. Parts of His ways are recognised; "but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?" He is working in the earth which He has filled with good; in the heavens which declare His glory; in the movements of men's spirits which accuse themselves, repent, trust, love; in the prosperous or depressed trade of nations, in their freedom from or subjection to calamities; in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of the Son of His love who hath declared Him. Wonderful in number and variety are the views which God has provided for willing hearts. "They are new every morning." It is a sign of no reverence or true knowledge when some assume to tell just what God must show of Himself, just what God must do. They forget that He gives no account of His matters—that "He dwells in the thick darkness." It is for men to be humble before Him, even though He may let them see many a token of His will. They are to look and wait. "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie" (Hab. ii. 1–3).

V. "The word of the Lord came expressly" (ver. 3).

This is an evidence of the fact that the vision and the word were closely allied in prophetical phenomena. Isaiah "*saw the word* which he received concerning Judah and Jerusalem." Amos begins his book thus, "*The words* of Amos which he *saw* concerning Israel." Daniel was overwhelmed by a great vision, "yet heard the voice of his words." Paul had "visions and revelations of the Lord." John in Patmos saw one like unto the Son of man, and then listened to what He said. So was it with Ezekiel now.

Notice: 1. "*God is His own interpreter.*" Symbols and scenes are less capable of definite explanation than words. It is hazardous to take impressions, feelings &c., as intimating the will of God, in the absence of His Word or of principles

which His Word embraces. So He "spake in time past in the prophets," and "in these last days in His Son." He can make His visions, manifestations, plain, and no one who wants to know His will in sincerity can live without having some signs of what that will really is.

2. *There are tests for learning "what God the Lord doth speak."* It has often perplexed men's minds how to discern between a suggestion from God and a suggestion from some other source. There is no short and easy method applicable to all cases. Not the strength of the impression, not mere unhesitating confidence in its divineness, not its apparent conformity to what has been done, not the memory of words of Scripture which seem to sanction it, can decide the doubt. Conscience, though willing to do only the will of God, may give different promptings from those of the Spirit of God. We are left without any infallible guide; but surely no one who wants to order his conduct aright will fail to discern, sooner or later, what is of God or of man. It may be there was for His prophets a special light in which they saw that they were addressed by God, and so were both made sure and warranted to say, "Thus saith the Lord God;" but it is not likely that they could have given any explicit information on the point. They knew His voice, as the sheep of the Good Shepherd know *His*, yet are unable to explain how they do so. Let it be believed that God is our Father, and we shall find little difficulty in granting that He can make His children know He is speaking to them and that they are not deceived.

3. *God's servants must teach according to the Word of God.* They cannot make truth; they must receive it "from above." Their souls should be as a mirror on which He casts His rays, and which send forth a faithful reflection. They are to be as a channel through which the water of life may flow unimpeded. Each one may exhibit his own characteristic qualities of mind, as water takes the tint of the rocky bed over which it runs. No prophet is a reproduction of any other prophet. No apostle is a copy of another apostle. No believing man or woman is exactly like to any one else among "the saints of the Most High." The Lord of all makes each seed to have its own body, and envelops therein some property which is of use to other existences, so has He constituted each soul distinct, and each is capable of acting in behalf of the King of Truth. Therefore should every one strive to grow by feeding on His Word. Only thus can they teach to profit—only thus can they expect "the demonstration of the Spirit"—when not the words of man's wisdom but the words of the only wise God are declared.

4. *We can have access to the Word of God.* It is not now a gift bestowed upon a few selected individuals; it is the endowment of mankind. "The Word was with God, and the Word was God, . . . and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, . . . full of grace and truth." We can come to the Light and Life, and hear Him at all times. All the history, all the psalms, all the prophecies of the Old Testament have some more or less portion of the testimony of Jesus. "Search the Scriptures, for they testify of" Him. Come to Him, for "whosoever will may come." We are in a more lofty position than Ezekiel was, and can see and hear more fully from God and of God than he did. What manner of persons ought we to be! "Obeying the truth through the Spirit," abiding in Christ, and the word of Christ abiding in us. "Take heed how ye hear."

VI. "**The hand of the Lord was there upon him**" (ver. 3).

"Hand is equivalent to sovereignty in its fullest meaning, and sovereignty in that meaning does not admit of degrees" (*The Aryan Household*). It is a symbol in Scripture of impulse, power, &c., and capable not only of laying the foundation of the earth and of spanning the heavens, but also of being laid gently on the heads of little children as well as on sorrowing, awestruck men. Its touch prepared for another stage in Ezekiel's development. It infused strength for seeing and acting in his new vocation. It sanctified him, set him apart, so that he was constituted a true and capable prophet to Israel. Observe—

1. *The real power in serving the Lord.* It is contact with Him. Daniel could not hear the divine messages till a hand touched Him (Dan. x. 10). John could receive the revelation after the right hand of the Glorified had been laid on him (Rev. i. 17). Every disciple must be strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man (Eph. iii. 16), in order "to will and to do of His good pleasure." Obstacles lie in man's heart which have to be overcome, and the hand of the Lord presses them down or sweeps them away. When it is laid on us, then we can do all things; then, whatever may be accomplished, with money, with words, with deeds for the kingdom of God in the world, owes its success to His giving His hand to it. "Severed from me, ye can do nothing." We must have the word of Christ, and also Christ Himself to dwell in us, else we shall fail in fulfilling the word of the truth of the gospel. Prayer, reading and hearing the Word, teaching and preaching it, are "as tinkling cymbals" if the power of Christ do not rest on us.

2. *Be at the disposal of the Lord.* (1.) *Implicitly.* Let there be no obstructions, no reserves. The creature has no claim except in correspondence to that of his Creator, the bondsman no choice but that of his lord, the ransomed no half-heartedness towards his deliverer. Whosoever is touched so that he is impelled to say "It is the Lord," then no hesitancy, no trouble should be regarded by him in any light but that of a temptation out of which a way of escape is to be found. (2.) *On the spot.* In our own houses or lodgings, in business or worship, in health or ailments, in agreeable conditions or disagreeable, begin to obey the pressure of God's hand *there.* "The one secret of life and development is not to devise and plan, but to fall in with the forces at work, to do every moment's duty aright, that being the part of the process allotted to us; and let come, not what will, for there is no such thing, but what the Eternal thought wills for each of us, has intended for each of us from the first" (*G. Macdonald*). (3.) *Confidingly.* Darkness may fall, weakness may be experienced, opponents may bar the way, fear not. He upholds by the right hand of His righteousness. Maintain the thought of a present Lord, in contact with your spirit, putting you forth but also going before you, and you will find a force which will more than conquer all against you. It is no dream, no cunningly devised fable, that Christ Jesus is with us.

3. *Trust to receive impulses from the Lord.* The life of God in the soul is not a constantly equal force. It is sometimes hardly distinguishable from the life of sense, and at other times it is as if it was more than conqueror over the world and the flesh. Prayer is now easy, but then it is a drag. Here we walk in darkness, and have no light on the ways of the Lord; and there we seem enabled to "mount up on wings as eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint." The God of all grace will stablish, strengthen, perfect, settle. From ordinary earthly surroundings He can lead so that we shall, first, be made to feel that another world affects us; then, that God manifests Himself to us; and afterwards, that He imparts to us of His own strength. Thus may we be filled with the Spirit.

4. *Our ordinary places of sojourn may be made memorable.* Not only nations remember places where events historically important to them have occurred; not only cities and towns keep up memories of persons and actions interesting to their inhabitants; but also individual believers in God can record of one spot or another that the Lord met them there. How precious a thought it is that there is no place whatever but may become a Bethel—a house of God—to any traveller towards eternity! A private room, a church, a prison, a street, a hillside, a river-bank will be sacred, as no other place can be sacred, if they have witnessed a stimulating manifestation of what God can do. Be we where we may, we may be there with the unseen Christ, and He will be its glory.

Thus Ezekiel was *designated.* He was not consecrated by any enactment of the law of Moses. No oil of anointment was poured upon his head to authorise him to prophesy. No hands of predecessors were laid upon him. He is chosen

and set apart by the Lord alone, and he, with all true prophets, is a type of the coming time when the children should be all taught of the Lord, for the Spirit would be poured out upon us from on high. We are under this dispensation. We must guard against supposing that human appointments to ministry for the Lord are valid if He has not called to it. There is no true ordination but that of the hand of the Lord, and there is no true service but that which opens out to more service. Vague longings for God may be turned into real manifestations; visions of God may prepare for feeling the hand of God. Such are the ways of "the God of Israel, who giveth strength and power to His people: blessed be God!" "Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

"I saw visions of God."

The Sources of Religious Sensibility.

1. *Man must consider himself.* Let him examine his own nature, look at the wonderful mechanism which is going on in his own breast, and he will surely awake to a sense of the high and exalted relations which his existence sustains. But he lives in the world. Material objects engross and enthral his mind. He converses not with his own spirit. He considers not what manner of being he is. Let this thoughtlessness be laid aside, and it will not be strange if he come to a living conception of that mighty Being from whom we all spring, and by whom we all subsist.

2. *He must consider the wonderful works external to himself.* The green earth and its diversities of scenery, the canopy above it, bright with stars and burning suns, show visions of power, wisdom, goodness transcending his utmost ability to measure and fathom. Let him think of these, and will he not feel how awful and stupendous the Author of such prodigies must be?

3. *He must consider how different man is from what he might have been expected to be.* With eyes to see visions of God, he bends them to the earth. He does not realise the purposes for which he is made, the character he is to acquire, the destiny placed within his reach. How much is there in the course of human affairs to trouble and perplex? Ignorance and superstition brood over a large portion of the habitable globe. In Christian countries how little is seen of that purity, faith, and piety which Christ enjoins. But all that need not destroy the conviction that we are under a wise and merciful God—that it is impossible for Him who has displayed in the frame of man, in the constitution of the outer world, in the gospel of Christ, such tokens of wisdom and love, to exercise other than a government of perfect benevolence. It is absurd to suppose that we, who are but of yesterday, should be able to interpret the many mysterious and inscrutable events in human affairs, though all will be clear when the day shall dispel the midnight vapours.

4. *He must consider how God has been trusted in.* We know of men who have been subjected to heavy assaults because they believed in the Word of God—of Jesus Christ, in despisal and rejection, upheld by communings with His Father; and we learn that in duties, harassments, weariness, death, our safety, strength, consolation will be obtained in those retirements of the soul where our eyes are opened to see visions of God.—Madge (*condensed*).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Dates.—The Jews, if there is any truth in their history at all, were a journalising people. . . . The prophets keep a diary of their visions. Everywhere do they record the dates, the year, the day of the month, the attending chronological circumstances of the burdens and messages with which, as they allege, they have been commissioned by the Lord. If these dates are put in by compilers, long after the times of the prophetic visions, then there is no reason for it, no meaning in it. . . It is an easier theory that every word of the prophetic writings had been forged. There is but one other supposition: the dates and the visions are from the same persons, and these are the prophets themselves writing and speaking at the times they

profess to write and speak, and in relation to actual existing events that form the subjects of their warning. The seers, the times, the nation, the national life, it is all one true picture—*in its parts* most truthful and natural; *in its whole* suggestive of an extraordinary and difficult problem. Let any man attempt to explain its natural without bringing in its supernatural, or some other supernatural—if he can.—*Taylor Lewis.*

Names.—What is the real historical significance of the deeply religious character of Jewish names, their strong theistic or rather monotheistic aspect, their continual expression of faith and hope, their so frequent allusions to the ideas of covenant and redemption? And why too, may we ask, do so many of these appellations end in El and Jah, ever calling up the two great divine names with their most holy ideas? Let the reader ponder well the fact, and see if he can find any other reason for this *national seal*, this naming after the Lord, as we may call it, than the great all-explaining fact that they were indeed "a chosen people," "an elect people," whom for high and world-wide reasons God had taken *as His own* "when he separated the sons of Adam and gave the nations their inheritance." It is a standing memorial, handed down from generation to generation, that "this was the people whose God," whose El or Mighty One, was Jehovah, the God of the Covenant, who had been their fathers' God, and who had given them those glorious promises, ineffaceable by the bondage of generations, that in them and in their seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed."—*Taylor Lewis.*

Visions.—Thankfulness for being made capable of seeing this "burning west" [glorious vision of Arran], and of being so affected by its beauty, gave place to thankfulness for the spiritual eye opened in me, by which I saw the Eternal Light and the Eternal Beauty; thankfulness that was much mingled with self-condemnation, as I reflected that . . . that which my spiritual eye saw is an ever-present glory, to be seen wherever the eye opens on it; and yet my memories of it were of what had been seen only at long intervals . . . in a solemn sense of choice. I say *in a sense* of choice, because I do not feel in reality that the opening of the eye that sees the spiritual, so that the spirit is flooded with its proper light, is so simple a matter, or so absolutely to be determined by a mere volition, as the opening of the bodily eye. That "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" we do not see in its brightness simply by turning to it. For such vision beyond habitual faith we wait on the Holy Spirit, and have it not in our own hand. But still we know that he that soweth bountifully reaps bountifully.—*Macleod Campbell.*

Power.—The distinction is always assuming more and more importance to my mind, viz., that between the special acting of the Divine Spirit in the revelation of truth not previously revealed to men, and His acting in enabling us to apprehend that truth, and to advance in its light and the life which it feeds. . . . No explanation seems adequate which admits not—rather, assumes not—that God can, and when it seemeth good to Him does give the human spirit to know His own presence, and His own touch, otherwise than in that *highest* way which is communion with Himself in the light of life. *This* . . . the whole record of Revelation seems to me to teach as to those great events in the history of intercourse between God and men which we have been accustomed to receive as "Divine Revelation," viz., a knowledge of being spoken to by the living God which was not an inference from the nature of that which God spake—a knowledge common to Balaam and Jonah with Moses and Samuel, and distinct from all communion in the word that came to them. What this was I know not, and may never know. . . . What we seek to know is, surely, the actual fact as to what God does in the earth, of which we may not make our own experience the measure; while we cannot be too thankful for that clear consciousness of seeing light in God's light which may be our temptation to do so.—*Macleod Campbell.*

Experience of God.—Now and then a great experience comes unexpected and unsought. It touches the greater chords of the soul, and lifts it above the common level of emotion, outruns all former knowledge. . . . But what other experience is like that of the personal disclosure of God in the soul. . . . There comes an hour to some, to many, of transfiguration. It may be in grief; it may be in joy; it may be the opening of the door of sickness; it may be in active duty; it may be under the roof or under the sky, where God draws near with such reality, glory, and power that the soul is filled, amazed, transported. All before was nothing; all afterwards will be but a souvenir. That single vision, that one hour, is worth the whole of life, and throws back a light on all that went before. It . . . gives to the soul some such certainty of invisible, spiritual truths as one has of his own personal identity. When one has had this hour of divine disclosure, of full and entrancing vision, it never can be retracted, or effaced, or reasoned against, or forgotten.—*Ward Beecher.*

2. The View given to Ezekiel of "the Likeness of the Glory of the Lord" (Chap. i. 4–28).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 4. **The storm-cloud.** "A whirlwind," a tempest such as Job perceived (xxxviii. 1), or like that which Jonah encountered (ii. 11), "**came out of the north,**" the region from which the Chaldean forces proceeded, and, in general, to the Jews, "the region pregnant with destiny"

(*Hengst.*). "A great cloud, and a fire infolding itself." Fire in volumes was mixed up with the cloud, and (Exod. ix. 24) flashed hither and thither, circling round. "A brightness was about it," the cloud, "and out of the midst thereof," of the fire, "as the colour of amber," or as the eye of *chasmal*. The appearance was such as gave tints, shone, burned like *chasmal*. The mild colour of amber does not seem to express the meaning of this uncertain word. There was a look like that of ore glowing from "the midst of the fire."

Vers. 5–14. **The living creatures.** Ver. 5. Out of this same fire came "the likeness of four living creatures," representing all beings with life (Rev. iv. 6); and, as the best representative of vital energies, each of the four had "the likeness of a man." But not entirely so. Ver. 7. "Their feet," including knee and thigh, were of the nature of "a straight foot;" they were upright, not bent, and that part which was next the ground was "like the sole of a calf's foot, and they sparkled like the colour," the eye, the gleam "of burnished," or shining, "brass" (Rev. i. 15). Their wings proceeded from their shoulders, for (ver. 8) "they had the hands of a man under their wings," one hand under each of "their four sides." Ver. 9. Two "wings" of each "were joined" to a wing of each of its nearest neighbours, and as each had four faces, one of which looked towards a distinct quarter of the sky, "they turned not when they went." So "they went every one straight forward" in the direction in which any one of their faces looked, and as a conjunct whole. Ver. 10. Of the four faces, one was like that of "a man," another like that of "a lion," another of "an ox," and the fourth of "an eagle." Ver. 11. "Thus were their faces, and their wings were stretched upward;" rather, *and their faces and their wings were separated from above*, *i.e.*, it could be seen that their heads were distinct and their wings were distinct, though two wings of one were in contact with two wings of others. Ver. 12. They were moved by an irresistible impulse, and, separated as they were from one another, yet they were animated by one life-breath. "Whither the spirit was to go, they went." Ver. 13. "Their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of lamps," torches; "it," the fire, was separate from, and "went up and down among the living creatures." Ver. 14. The creatures had a motion which made the impression as of a "flash" of a meteor, or "the zigzag course" of "lightning."*

Vers. 15–21. **The wheels.** Ver. 15. "Behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces." Ezekiel saw wheels upon the ground, one in close proximity to each of the four creatures, and lower than they. Ver. 16. "They four" wheels "had one likeness;" each consisted of two wheels really, "as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel," set in the other at right angles. Ver. 17. "They went upon their four sides;" they could go in any direction without turning round. Ver. 18. "As for their rings," circumference or felloes, "they were so high that they were dreadful," they had both height and terribleness, and "full of eyes round about." Ver. 20.

* The cherubims in Tabernacle and Temple had each one face; those of Ezekiel have four faces. We work up in dreams a mixture of things which we have come across in different places. Did Ezekiel, in his ecstasy, make up his representations of the living creatures with objects familiar to those who sojourned in Assyria, the land of his exile? "The approaches to the hall at Nimroud were guarded by pairs of colossal figures. At the chief entrance were human-headed winged lions, the human shape being continued down to the waist, and furnished with arms. . . . Expanded wings spring from the shoulders and spread over the back. . . . The entrance on the south was guarded by human-headed winged bulls, whilst the two doorways on the north were both guarded by winged lions with the heads of men and with human arms. . . . It will be observed that the four forms (and those only) chosen by Ezekiel to illustrate his description—the man, the lion, the bull, and the eagle—are precisely those which are constantly found on Assyrian monuments. . . . They could find no better type of intellect and knowledge than the head of the man; of strength than the body of the lion; of rapidity of motion than the wings of a bird."—*Layard*.

"The spirit of the living creature was in the wheels." The same energy which actuated the former actuated the latter also, and they were one in standing, going, or rising upwards.

Vers. 22–28. **The throned one.** Ver. 22. Above "the heads of the living creatures" Ezekiel saw an expanse extended, having a colour like that "of the terrible crystal," exciting fear by its purity and splendour. Ver. 23. "Under the firmament," or expanse, which therefore came between the throne and the living creatures, "were their wings straight, the one toward the other," joined to one another, as ver. 11, "and every one had two which covered;" there was a wing for each side of "their bodies." Ver. 24. When the living creatures were in movement "the noise of their wings was like . . . the voice of speech," rather, "the noise of tumult, as the noise of an host." The sounds were heard only when they were in motion, for "when they stood they let down their wings." Ver. 25. Their movement or rest was not self-directed, but was instigated or checked by "a voice from the firmament that was over their heads," from Him who was on the throne, since, ver. 26, "above the firmament was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of" the pale-blue "sapphire stone, and upon the likeness of the throne," not the distinguishable form of a man, but "the likeness as the appearance of a man." "No man hath seen God at any time." This manifestation had three aspects—ver. 27. (1.) Over the dim form was shed shining light like to glowing ore, and the same as in ver. 4, which radiated "from the appearance of his loins even upward" (chap. viii. 2). (2.) Upon the lower part, "from the appearance of his loins even downward was as it were the appearance of fire." (3.) All round was a shining light (ver. 28), "as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain." Those three aspects were united to frame "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." The visions of God overpowered Ezekiel, "I fell upon my face" (Rev. i. 17).

The details of this wondrous vision may be summarised. A furious storm from the north is seen driving a vast cloud, pervaded and glowing with restless fires, and surrounded with radiance. From this fiery cloud four living beings appear, whose general aspect was that of man. Each had four different faces and four wings, and two of the wings were stretched out in juxtaposition to the wings of others. One spiritual energy stirred in the living creatures, and under its impulse they moved like meteors shooting across the field of vision and shining with the brightness of fire. By the side of each creature was a gigantic double wheel, not needing to turn when it changed from one direction to another. Eyes were set round the outer rims, and, possessed by the same energy as the living creatures, the wheels made all movements perfectly simultaneous with theirs. Above all was an expanse of awful pureness, and on which was the likeness of an azure throne. Some one in the figure of a man was seated on this throne—the upper half of his body shining like glowing metal, the lower half like fire, while, girdling round the throne, the hues of a bright rainbow were displayed. A voice proceeded from this throne-crowned expanse, at the sound of which the living creatures let down their wings in lowly reverence and silence. Ezekiel also heard himself addressed by an unseen speaker.

The appearances which accompanied the designation of Ezekiel, and also the repetition of their prominent aspects at other turns of his service, indicate the fact of a special meaning adhering to them in view of what was appointed him.*

1. *The storm, the cloud, the fire*, signify the wrath of God and the sufferings which may proceed therefrom. "The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet" (Nah. i. 3). Of Israel

* "If any one asks whether the vision is lucid, I confess its obscurity, and that I can scarcely understand it; but yet into what God has set before us, it is not only lawful and useful, but necessary to inquire. We shall perhaps but skim the surface of what God wills, yet this is of no small moment."—*Calvin.*

it is said, "The Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God" (Deut. iv. 24). Ezekiel is to prepare himself to carry a message of judgment and woe to his people; he is to be invested with authority and then to inspire them with terror. But not unmitigated. "The brightness round about," which vers. 27 and 28 signify to be that of the rainbow, warrants the belief that pity and grace will surround all inflictions. The false prophets spoke of deliverance without punishment and without repentance; Ezekiel has to bear down all such fancies, and proclaim that there will be scathing trials, but afterwards a new heart and the outpoured Spirit.

2. *The cherubim.* In chap. x. 20, Ezekiel intimates that the living creature which he saw by the Chebar he was led to recognise as the cherubims. An important part is assigned to them in the Bible. They were placed at the east of the garden of Eden; they stood over the Ark of the Covenant in Tabernacle and Temple. In each case they signified the divine presence. Hence the familiar expressions, "He dwelleth between the cherubims," "He sitteth between the cherubims." Their outstretched wings form "the chariot of the cherubims." While it is also said, "He rode upon a cherub," as a token that He rules all movements among the forces of nature. It was an obvious reflection of cherubic forms which John saw, in his Revelation, "in the midst of the throne." What did they signify? In all cases they signify that God is present, and belong to His manifestation in living, organised creatures, in all quarters of the world. It is to be noted that the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle on each are emblematical of the fulness and power of life. The fact that they were, in Ezekiel, double in number and more complex in form than those found in Tabernacle or Temple, is a fact which goes to prove that they were not real beings, not even angelic, but symbolical, and they "at one and the same time proclaim and veil His presence. When He is honoured as He who is enthroned above the cherubim, He is acknowledged as the God who rules the world on all sides, in power, wisdom, and omniscience." They represent not God Himself, except as He is absolute Life, working in living creatures and moving them to the ends which He prescribes. In accordance with those ends, the cherubims had the appearance which bright burning coals of fire have, yet the fire was separate from them. Thus was indicated that all living creatures could be made to carry out the righteous judgment of God with ominous rapidity. So Ezekiel was prepared to testify that all hopes of earthly help which Israel might cherish would be speedily falsified.

3. *The wheels.* In the Buddhist, and partially in the Hindu religion, a wheel "is the symbol of supreme power in the hands of certain monarchs, who are held to have exercised universal dominion, and who are, for this reason, termed *turners of the wheel.*" A similar idea is conveyed here. The wheels represent the forces of nature as distinct from, but in working harmony with, living beings. This distinction appears from chap. x. 13, where the right interpretation seems to be that the wheels were called *Galgal*, "whirlwind;" and from chap. x. 6, where fire was taken from between them. Those natural energies revolve, along with the cherubim, under obedience to one and the same inworking impulse. They are used when the Spirit will, and go to any quarter of the heaven that He wills. One wheel is within another; changes are complicated, and not in one direction only. They are full of eyes: "the symbol of intelligent life; the living Spirit's most peculiar organ and index." "Space is everywhere equally present to them." They do not move blindly; they can perceive that which is opposed to the interests of God in any quarter; they can follow up all traces of His enemies, and carry His terrors wherever they should strike. Ezekiel must expect to speak of various trials hanging over all classes in Israel, and certainty in their infliction.

4. *The appearance of a throned man.*

"Whose faith has centre everywhere,
Nor cares to fix itself to form."

This portion of the vision is seen upon

a firmament which presents "visible poetry, gloriously embossed, and whose psalms are writ in the rhythm of motion." It intimates that "the heavens do rule," that all forms of animate and inanimate existence are under the will of the God of glory.* Besides, He is in a human form, which cannot be adequately seen, while the appearance of brightness and fire, and a rainbow, indicates the holiness and righteousness and grace which make a glorious unity in Him, and are possessed in absolute perfection—a type of the glory and grace of Him who was made flesh and dwelt among us. "God is the unrepresentable One. He has no similitude; and yet, without any misgiving or sense of inconsistency, there are ascribed to Him acts and appearances which, without the conceptive or imaging faculty, can have for us neither force nor meaning" (*Lewis*). The mighty voice and the movements with the cherubims point to the truth that He punishes His enemies and comforts His friends. Thus, sitting above the cherubims, He does the same as in the Temple, yet with differences. He was about to work in new methods, and would make known to exiled Israel, through Ezekiel, that if their covenant was to "vanish away," He would not go. He would rule the heathen as well as His chosen seed, and one day evoke from all quarters the glorious cry, "Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

> "One God, one law, one element,
> And one far-off Divine event,
> To which the whole creation moves."
> —*Tennyson.*

"There was nothing accidental or capricious about this vision; all was wisely adjusted and arranged, so as to convey beforehand suitable impressions of that work of God to which Ezekiel was now called to devote himself. It was substantially an exhibition by means of emblematical appearances and actions, of the same views of the Divine character and government, which were to be unfolded in the successive communications made by Ezekiel to the covenant-people" (*Fairbairn*).

HOMILETICS.

(1.) The Vision is Suggestive Regarding the Government of God.

I. As to its resources.

1. *They are manifold.* Wind and fire, thunder and lightning, the wisdom of man, brute force, patient labour, swift movements are significant portions of the materials which He can gather to execute His purposes. Men live in perpetual contact with forces which may affect their organs of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and which can be marshalled in any number, in any strength, and at any moment. We see wrongly if we do not see that the uniform of God's servants is worn by all animate and inanimate creatures.

2. *They are mutable.* They are restrained and again in motion, now in the darkness and then in the light, here as a glow and there as a meteoric flash, acting inertly at one time and intensely after that. Changes continually come up. How remarkable are the vicissitudes in nations, churches, families. We are settled in nothing—in nothing but in God.

3. *They are inscrutable.* "We are but of yesterday and know nothing." We see little else than an item on the outside of a few of His resources. "His judgments are a great deep." "His providence walks and works, darkly, deeply, changeably, wheels about so that mortals cannot tell what conclusions to make" as to all the causes which bring about changes, or as to all the consequences which

* "The cherubim with the living wheels form, so to speak, the chariot, the base for the living God. All this is the mere forecourt of the divine sphere; the innermost circle is reserved for God as living Spirit. If we approach from the side of the world, this heavenly fulness of life may already appear to be the Godhead or God. But when we are in possession of the Divine Personality, that fulness will be a predicate of God, a mere substratum, so to say of His Personality."—*Dorner*

shall follow. "His ways are high above, out of our sight," with nations, councils, churches, individuals—in panics, wars, demoralisations.

4. *They are subordinated to one pervading impulse.* Living or non-living, one and the same mighty Spirit works in all. The Spirit which brooded over a chaotic creation "renews the face of the earth" year by year. The Spirit of understanding and of love is the "Spirit of judgment and of burning." He divides to each thing severally as He will; but there is no division in their camp. They do not fall out by the way. They work together to fulfil His word. There is no crookedness in their goings when He commands to go "straight forward." They run very swiftly in accordance with the might by which He energises them. No bullet goes so fairly or rapidly to the target as do the manifold resources of God when stirred by the Spirit of life. Why should men resist Him? Why do they yield to a spirit of error, of lying, and of whoredoms, except on the ground that they rebel and vex the Holy Spirit? When will that kingdom which is righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost, be permanent on earth? But whatever discord may be introduced by men, the Spirit will not be baulked in His aims. "He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him," and He will avenge the dishonour done to His righteousness and grace by means of the pliant resources at His command. They do not look back, that would have denoted unwillingness; nor turn aside, that would have intimated self-will; nor suspend their movements before their course is completed, that would have spoken of weariness. So should men follow obediently, unswervingly, persistently Him who guides wanderers into the way of life, and sustains them therein.

5. *They inflict chastisement.* Gales, fire, lightning, are disastrous in various ways to men. The doors of Lebanon open that the fire may devour its cedars. Snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest rain upon the wicked, and Ezekiel saw such agencies in action as ominous of calamities which he was to declare would befall his people. Thus, above Nebuchadnezzar and his desolating army; above losses, pains, bereavements; above wars, depression of trade, lowering of health, we must observe the signs of the Lord condemning untruthfulness, unrighteousness, formality, pride, selfishness. "Who can stand before Him when once He is angry?" Is there not a warning to "cease to do evil, to learn to do well"?

6. *They may be brought from any quarter.* Out of the north, as the Assyrians; out of the east, as the plague of locusts in Egypt; out of the north-east, as the Euroclydon in Paul's sea passage to Rome, God's resources can be drawn. Men may boast of their soldiery or navy, of their preparedness for any war, of their civilization or religiousness, of their worship or their benevolence; but they lay themselves open to the menacing word, "I the Lord do blow upon it." In front, in flank, or in rear assailants may fall upon them. "Political changes and revolutions are, after all, only the moving of the shadow on the earthly dial-plate, that marks the mightier motions going forward in the heavens."—*Moore.*

7. *They radiate with mercy.* His resources are not only for punishment. They are meant to show to men their evil and their need of repentance; to show that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Judgment is His "strange act." He wants to purify the world, though the process be slow, just as He is separating the dross from the heart of every believer in His Son. Even if a deluge of wrath is sent forth in order to sweep off evil habits from a people, after the floods have lifted up their voice the rainbow will appear. The covenant of the Lord is sure in faithfulness and mercy. "Once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

II. As to the representation of the divine.

1. *It is supreme.* All things are under His feet. He is a Prince upon His throne. Nothing stirs or rests, nothing develops or degenerates, nothing pains or

soothes apart from His control. It is not a mechanical force which operates the changes of all creatures. It is ONE who possesses power, wisdom, righteousness, love—"who does His will among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of this earth." What can stand if He will overthrow? Who hinder if He will open the gates to anxiety, sorrow, shame, death?

2. *It is closely allied to man.* Ezekiel saw "the likeness of the appearance of a man." We must not say that God is corporeal and has the figure of a man, but we can say that He has some striking affinities with human nature—"For we are also His offspring"—and these foreshadow the mystery to be presented in the end of the world, and in which Paul grandly exults. God "was manifest in the flesh." Therefore was it possible for the Son of God to pray "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us."

3. *It is beyond our knowledge.* "He dwells in the light which no man hath seen or can see." He does condescend to our faculties, and by means of the hieroglyphics of undefined forms, of clouds, fire, living beings, revolutions, He shows us what His power and resources are. Our thoughts of Him suggest more riddles than they can solve. No research can define Him. There is a glory excelling that which men have beheld. He has never appeared as He really exists; but "He has so appeared as to leave no doubt on the minds of His servants as to their knowing that they have seen God." If in certain aspects He is "unknowable," yet all doubts as to His character pass away when Jesus reveals Him. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

III. As to the preparation of a human servant.

1. *Reverence.* A deep feeling pervades Ezekiel of the holy supremacy of God. He who is glorious produces another state of mind than that which springs from a gratified curiosity or an increased knowledge, and the man who is not "moved with fear" before the manifested will of the Almighty is a man who will never serve Him aright. The sight of Christ Jesus, the only-begotten of the Father, will lay us at His feet, utterly self-emptied by a sense of His spotless glory and our unworthiness, and will be a prelude to His touch and restoration.

2. *Weakness.* Ezekiel cannot act of himself in co-operation with this all-ruling God. He has no strength to carry out such arduous duties as are justly required. But this weakness is his stepping-stone to light and power. When he is weak then is he strong, for God will bestow sufficient grace. Trust in self is gone that God may work. Wisdom, energy, faithfulness not his own are open to him.

3. *Called.* Ezekiel is thrilled by the voice which addresses him. He could not serve at all till that call of God was heard. Men cannot act for His kingdom by their own impulses and preparations. It is not colleges or ordination by man which make fit, but, hearing the voice of the Lord within, they can take up any service pointed out, in face of their other occupations, of fears, of reluctance. Before Him all events, however solemn, all duties, however untried, become dwarfed and feasible. "In Christ strengthening me I can do all things." Between His voice and yours let no other voice come. You will know the mark to aim at, and reach "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." If we teach or preach about His kingdom without knowing we are warranted by Him, it is rather sin than service. His must be the impulse and sustainment.

4. *Susceptible.* Ezekiel hears; for it is little matter to have the call of God if we have not ears to hear. We must let that mind be in us which will desire to recognise and apprehend whatever He will say to us. "If men did consult with Christ, and do all upon His warrants, they should never miscarry in their ways, but proceed farther in the paths of godliness in a few weeks than they did before in many years."—*Greenhill.* "Though you have no visions of God, unwavering fealty to His law will secure that He will guide you by His counsel, and afterwards receive you to glory."—*Goulty.* When the suggestions and motions of God's Spirit come on a receptive heart, they subdue carnal reasonings, stubbornness of will, all

shifts and pretences, and frame "a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use," such as Ezekiel became.

"It is of much concernment for ministers to see that they have a good and clear call to their ministry. If they can clear it up that God hath sent them, they may expect His assistance, His blessing, His protection, and success in their labours. However things prove, this will be their comfort in the midst of opposition, reproach, persecution, hazard of liberty and lives; I was called of God, I am in His work, in His way, He brought me into His vineyard, He will stand by me, I will go on, let Him do with me what He pleaseth."—*Greenhill.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

God the life of all things.—Nothing exists, subsists, is acted upon or moved by itself, but by some other being or agent; whence it follows that everything exists, subsists, is acted upon, and is moved by the First Being, who has no origin from another, but is in Himself the force which is life.—*Swedenborg.* God has a world of real forces in Himself. He bears within Him an inexhaustible spring, by virtue of which He is the Life eternally streaming forth, but also eternally streaming back into Himself. He neither empties nor loses Himself in His vital activity. He is a sea of self-revolving Life; an infinite fulness of forces moves, so to speak, and undulates therein.—*Dorner.* In this communication of life, God gives Himself so unreservedly that creation feels Him as her own, His joy as her joy, His peace as her peace, His strength as her strength, His personality and independence as her personality and independence.—*W. White.*

Foreknowledge.—The divine foreknowledge has put a stamp of that which was coming upon that which went before. This stamp is the basis of figurative language, of analogy, of typology, of prophecy, yea, of all knowledge. Every lower thing is a figure, a type, or prophecy of a higher thing; every present thing contains a representation of a coming thing, and every visible thing is more or less the image of things invisible. God's foreknowledge thus becomes the great highway of knowledge to man, by which he can traverse not only the earth, but the universe so far as it is accessible to his inspection.—*W. White.*

Clouds.—Those war-clouds that gather on the horizon, dragon-crested, tongued with fire;—how is their barbed strength bridled? What bits are these they are champing with their vaporous lips; flinging off flakes of black foam? Leagued leviathans of the sea of heaven, out of their nostrils goeth smoke, and their eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. . . . Where ride the captains of their armies? Where are set the measures of their march? Fierce murmurers, answering each other from morning until evening—what rebuke is this which has awed them into peace? What hand has reined them back by the way by which they came? "The wondrous works of Him which is perfect in knowledge?" We have too great veneration for cloudlessness.—*Ruskin.*

Human ignorance.—There has never been a weak deity worshipped, and it is safe to say there never will be one. Man is too strong himself not to admire strength, and looks with pity or contempt upon weakness. And no deity can be pitied or despised and hold his sovereignty over men's minds. The heavens must be braced beyond the possibility of fall, or they who live beneath the dome could never gaze with awe into the overhanging spaces. . . . I do not expect that any of mortal kind have a correct idea of God. . . . How little do we know even yet of the qualities and uses of material and finite Nature! For Nature is yet a mystery. She sits like the veiled prophet in the inner temple of her abode, whose outer walls we in our groping have at last stumbled against, and upon the panels of whose mighty gates a few of our most ambitious scientists are beginning to rap. If, then, so little is known of Nature, how little indeed must we know of the Invisible Spirit, who is so removed from our senses that no man could look upon His face and live. How flippantly men talk of God! As if they could understand the measureless reality whose reflection they only behold! The men who say God must be this or that, must do this or that, are for the most part men who have great intellectual vanity and great spiritual ignorance. The bowed head, the closed eye, the hand on the mouth and the mouth in the dust,—these are the evidences of piety, and, I may say, of spiritual knowledge also.—*W. H. Murray.*

An infinite unknown.—We are separated from it, not by any anger of storm, not by any vain and fading vapour, but only by the deep infinity of the thing itself.—*Ruskin.* Capable are we of God, both by understanding and will; by understanding, as He is that sovereign truth which comprehends the rich treasures of all wisdom; by will, as He is that sea of goodness whereof whoso tasteth shall thirst no more.—*Hooker.*

A Seer.—The more I think of it, the more I find this conclusion impressed upon me—that the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to *see* something, and tell what it *saw* in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion—all in one.—*Ruskin.*

Law in the spiritual.—Laws are operant in the things of the Spirit as truly as in the

things of matter. The forces there are not disorderly, nor do the movements which they generate start haphazard. They are not impulsive, freakful, and fickle. They who suppose that the coming of the Spirit to human consciousness is the result of arbitrary sending and of periodical ordering, and not the result of a ceaseless and ceaselessly expressed benevolence, doubtless mistake. . . . The anarchy must be reduced to order; the chaos taught the use and made to feel the force of law; the imperfect organisations of society be supplanted by the perfect. . . . The Spirit, through change of custom, law, and habit, and by a gradual transition of the world from old to new, can, at last, after ages of revolution and growth, accomplish another structure.—*W. H. Murray.*

God manifested.—He the Creator, the Governor, became a presence clear and plain before men's hearts. He, by the marvellous method of the Incarnation, showed Himself to man. He stood beside man's work. He towered above, and folded Himself about, man's life. And what then? God in the world must be the standard of the world. Greatness meant something different when men had seen how great He was. Just suppose that suddenly Omniscience towered up above our knowledge, and Omnipotence above our strength, and the Infinite Wisdom stood piercing out of the sight of our ignorant and baffled skill. Must it not crush the man with an utter insignificance? . . . He would be brought face to face with facts. He would measure himself against the eternal pillars of the universe. He would learn the blessed lesson of his own littleness in the way in which it is always learnt most blessedly—by learning the largeness of larger things. . . . If you could only see God for ever present in your life, and Jesus dying for your soul, and your soul worth Jesus dying for, and the souls of your brethren precious in His sight, and the whole universe teeming with work for Him, then must come the humility of the Christian.—*Brooks.*

In the divinity of His person there is laid an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable ground for the most unbounded confidence. If He were a being possessed of nothing higher than the highest possible endowments of humanity, we might well scruple to place in such an one a confidence stretching through eternity. But being God, in trusting in Him we rely upon a power that cannot be withstood, upon a wisdom which hath no limits, upon a truth that is infallible, upon a love that is unchangeable, upon a fidelity that cannot fail.—*W. White.*

The enduring Word of God.—We are not more unworldly than the patriarchs, more spiritual than the prophets, more heavenly-minded than the apostles; we are not nearer the great celestial verities than men of the olden time—at least by any philosophy, or science, or culture of our own that is independent of the study and the grace of the Scriptures; we are not beyond the Bible either in its letter or its thought. There are ideas there the world has not yet fathomed; there are words and figures there whose rich significance interpretation has not yet exhausted. The scriptural style and the scriptural language are not meant for one age, but for all ages. Its Orientalisms will grow in the West; its archaisms will be found still young in the nineteenth century. Science is ever changing, as it is ever unfinished; its language is ever becoming obsolete, as it is ever superseded; philosophy is continually presenting some new phase of its ever-revolving cycles; the political world is ever a dissolving view; literature becomes effete, and art decays; "but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Not so sure are the types of nature as even the form and feature of this written word, if it be indeed *the word of God*, uttered in humanity, breathed into human souls, informing human emotions, conceived in human thoughts, made outward in human images, and indissolubly bound, as the wondrous narrative of the supernatural, in the long chain of human history.—*T. Lewis.*

Changes.—We are apt to fret and murmur at the motions of the wheels when they cross our hopes and interests; but if the Spirit of God be in the wheels and acts them according to His own pleasure, then all our impatience is groundless and sinful. We should stay and quiet our minds under all turns and changes in a world for discipline, rebuke, threatening, lamentation, calling.—*M. Meade.*

Unity.—The prophet, cast into the wide world and feeling himself lost in it, was led by the Divine Teacher into a region of thought to which the Israelite had been hitherto comparatively a stranger—was led to see how each part of the universe, which must have often seemed to him a storehouse of divided material idols, was pointing when seen by the divine light to a *spiritual* unity, as its explanation and its centre. . . . It is Spirit only which distinguishes and unites, which brings each thing forth in its clearness and fulness, and brings all into harmony, . . . a Spirit which had come from some higher region. There is One, human and divine, from whom this Spirit has proceeded, in whom it dwells perfectly.—*Maurice.*

3. The Commission to Ezekiel (Chaps. ii.–iii. 1–15).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. "Son of man." This is the customary form of address to Ezekiel, and is used only of him and Daniel among all the prophets. As both were prophesying in captivity, the title must have been conditioned by that fact, and would signify to the exiled prophets, away from the city which God had chosen to place His name there that above them He was

who was the God of the spirits of all flesh, who would communicate with the souls He owned, and supply all that would make up for absence from the land of promise and covenant. The title hardly could intimate, as is said by commentators, that Ezekiel was in need of a continual reminder of his human origin and frailty and unworthiness, or that he was to watch against being puffed up by his visions, or that he was spoken to familiarly as a special friend of God. We may listen to the phrase as expressing both a contrast and a connection between the speaker and the hearer.

Ver. 2. "The Spirit." Not the spirit of Ezekiel, as if he had been altogether unconscious and his spirit came to him again; nor scarcely the Holy Spirit, as operative in prophetic revelation; but the Spirit which was in the living creatures, and which, no doubt, was the Spirit of God.

Ver. 3. "The children of Israel." The most common expression used by Ezekiel for his people, perhaps significant of an amalgamation already begun of the Jews with the remnants of the ten tribes formerly gone into captivity. "To a rebellious nation," or *to the nations, the rebels.* They who were children of him who wrestled with the angel are deteriorated, not to the level of a heathen nation, as in Isaiah i. 4, but to that of heathen nations.

HOMILETICS.

(1.) Requisites for Executing the Commission (ii. 1–8).

I. Lively attention. Ezekiel must no longer lie upon his face; he must stand upon his feet if he is rightly to hear the voice of him that speaks. The call of God demands of our human faculties a readiness for action. They may be dead in sins or stunned by some masterful emotion, and the first thing needed is that they should be raised from such a state; then they will be fitted to hear and to obey. To be in a condition to do the work of the Lord, so far as that condition is dependent on a man himself, is to be in an attentive attitude regarding Him. Are we watching so that the moment in which the Master of the house comes we will open to Him?

II. Impulses to secure apprehension. The Lord acts in nature. He pledged Himself of old that the seasons should not cease while the earth remaineth, and He sends forth His Spirit in spring and reneweth the face of the earth. He works thus on man. Spiritual power, understanding, and love are wrought in their hearts by Him. Supplies suited to all the duties He may impose are forthcoming. He will bring persons who may be unconscious into consciousness, in darkness into light, and the hardest position in His kingdom can be occupied when the Spirit of the living God has entered into the occupant and the words of the Almighty Speaker are heard. Until he is fitted by the Spirit to hear the voice, words would be spoken in vain, however adapted to the sins, or weakness, or ignorance of his soul. But he is quickened. The Spirit enters into him, and the words which follow profit him. So two factors develop our apprehension of God's will—His Spirit in us and His words to us. The efficacy of the words proceeds from the Spirit; the words are the means by which the Spirit energises us. Read the Word of the Lord, preach it, spread it, but never be forgetful that the grasping it by the understanding and obeying it with the will come from the Spirit whom Christ sends from the Father.

III. A clear defining of the evil to be engaged with. God practises no concealment to His servant. He urges him to count the cost, and look, by His light, on the materials he has to deal with. He is to regard them as God directs. He is to submerge any tendency to make excuses for his people, and also his wishes for peace, comfort, honour, remuneration, and hold up to view the solemn and deep-searching decisions of the Lord.

1. *The evil is contrariety to God.* Israel had forsaken Him to serve idols. To

leave Him, to pervert His ordinances, or the mixing up devices of their own with these is a renunciation of His authority—is rebellion. Departing from the Lord was the root which sent its sap into each branch, twig, leaf of their conduct before His sight, and gave character to every false, unjust, selfish, impure thought, word, or action, with which they were chargeable. In dealing with men on God's behalf, His servants must never blink the fact that it is not mere mistakes, mere misfortune, they have to contend with; but it is with "the minding of the flesh, which is enmity against God." Yet they will not refrain from urging His claims to implicit submission, and will desire to execute their service in the knowledge that they are "earthen vessels," and "the excellency of the power" is with God alone.

2. *The evil is hereditary.* It does not die out when a generation is dead. It was operative in the Israel who dwelt in Canaan, and it is operative in the Israel captive in Babylon. As the fathers resisted the Holy Ghost so did the descendants. Parents should learn not to continue in sin against God for their children's sake, and children learn that a father's example is not a binding rule as to what to worship. Not from parentage, not from ancestors, not from mere antiquity must we learn our duty, but always try our procedure by the revealed will of God.

3. *The evil affects both the inner and the outer life.* The heart is at one with the conduct. No chasm, no rotted bridge lies between them and prevents them from uniting their forces against God. No regrets within hamper the words and deeds which offend Him, and the sinning men go with unblushing faces in their own ways. Such is the evil to be dealt with, and "who is sufficient for these things?" It is not merely perplexing to human strength and wisdom; it is impossible for men to encounter it effectively, except the Spirit is given them from above to know what God is, and what God purposes for salvation.

IV. Support from the authority of God. Any attempts to destroy such rooted impiety could bring nothing but reproaches, repulses, and defeats, if not under the authorisation of the Lord the Spirit. That is provided—

1. *By positive appointment:* "I send thee." Ezekiel has good ground for the stand he is required to take. He is an ambassador of the great king—sufficient warrant for any message of woe or of comfort, and a pledge that all needs will be supplied. The secret place for receiving true power, knowledge, wisdom, and adaptation to a service is here. I do not go to it of myself. I do not seek my own things but the things which are Jesus Christ's. I have behind me all forces, for He is with me who has "all power in heaven and in earth."

2. *By a full title to use His name.* He deputes Ezekiel to stand in His stead. All that he is to say, so standing, will express the true state of the relations between God and the people, and will all hold good. His servants are prompted to learn thoroughly and to utter plainly that which God has revealed. If they are not able to appeal to any special vision or ordination of the Lord, they can lie open to His Spirit, be led into all the truth, and declare it with no hesitancy of accent. They "preach not themselves but Christ Jesus the Lord." "Their word is with power."

V. Persevered in through all circumstances.

1. *Because fitted for men.* A divine message is not dependent for its truth on any earthly position in which it may be uttered, or on any treatment which it may receive. Accepted or rejected, it retains its authority and adaptation. Farmers must prosecute operations in their fields whatever the appearance of the clouds may be, sure that vivifying rays of the sun will act. So they who are sent with the truth of God must affirm its declarations, even if to do so be both arduous and unproductive. Their encouragement and their constancy are to be taken from God, not from the results which might gratify the mind of the flesh.

2. *Because it will not be altogether vain.* Should no success, such as teachers are eager to see, ever come, and people maintain their attitude of disobedience to God, some end, which He has proposed, shall be sure of accomplishment. He will

vindicate His righteousness and love somehow, and present the way of truth so that men will not be able to plead ignorance of His appeal to them. They shall know, even though they persist in stubbornness and rebellion, that a prophet—a man with words of rebuke and impulse—has been among them. "The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light."

3. *Because obstacles are not bound to paralyse efforts.* Men who have God on their side are stronger than all that can be against them. His kingdom never has attempted an advance except in face of chiding, and adverse reports, and sullen looks. His servants are not to count such trials as strange things, but set their faces as a flint and urge His warnings and entreaties unwaveringly. When the Lord is on their side they need not fear men's procedure. Like their perfect Exampler, they should be warranted to say, "When I would have gathered you, ye would not."

VI. Demands implicit submission. To stand before the Lord of hosts, like Elijah, and be empowered to bear His messages, what stronger force can there be than that to constrain men, who are loyal to God, to do whatsoever He wishes? What if their preaching and teaching seem to be addressed as to a blank wall? That will not prompt them to falter, to blunt the edge of the sword of the Spirit, or to compromise the claims of any truth. "It is required of stewards that a man be found faithful." They are not so to the interests of the kingdom of God, they who are unwilling to meet evil reports or good reports; to stand in the midst of calumnies, threats, oppressions; to find in the very obstinacy of their hearers that which develops a deepening regard for God and a deepening sympathy for men. For all true-hearted men will be anxious not to be rebellious as others whom they see to be rebellious, being sure of this, nobody but himself can make him a rebel. Above all, should preachers and teachers hear the voice of Jesus, so that they shall speak what He bids them, and never be disheartened by the indifference, the levity, the contempt, the resistance shown by those who do not take heed how they hear.

(2.) Conscious Acceptance of the Commission (Chaps. ii. 8—iii. 3).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 9. "**Sent unto me**;" rather, *put forth unto me* (as in chap. viii. 3). Ver. 10. "**Written within and without**," as indicating the number of overwhelming afflictions which were to fall upon the rebellious.

Chap. iii. ver. 3. "**Cause thy belly to eat and fill thy bowels with this roll.**" So the eating could not be corporeal; it, too, was happening in the visions, and enjoined Ezekiel to take whatever would be spoken to him into his inner man, there to be assimilated with his own feelings, thoughts, will, and then to be declared to the people.

HOMILETICS.

Duty Accepted for Reasons.

I. As the commission issues from a divine source. This is signified—

1. *By its direction.* A hand carried the symbolic medium of the commission, and Ezekiel recognised that hand to be His whose mighty voice he heard. God often appoints to duties by figures which are not unfamiliar to men. Moses saw a bush burning, Isaiah had a live coal laid upon his lips, Jeremiah's mouth was touched by a hand, and Ezekiel is shown a book. And now, when men hear of the cross, the tomb, the throne, they are told of that which is not revealed by flesh and blood, but by our Father in heaven. Thus the Christ, who is always with us, directs to hearts the truth He would have them believe and obey, and what we ought to desire is not vision but faith. "We walk by faith, not by sight."

2. *By its plainness to the understanding.* Ezekiel could not have made anything

out of the book unless its Holder had unrolled it and showed its contents. Then he gets a glimpse of the persons to whom he has to go, and of the prominence he is to give to threats of coming woes. The Lord would let His servant clearly see what he has to do. He wishes no vagueness or obscurity to be in any mind as to the certain retribution for sin. He wants to convince our intelligence. Mysteries there cannot but be in His procedure, but He sanctions no blind faith. He gives us as much light as we can bear for the time, and more will be added. "He opens the understanding to understand the Scriptures." "He gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater." The boldest of all followers of Christ the Way will be those who most clearly see that He is the Light, and that "whoso believes in Him shall not abide in darkness, but shall have the light of life." They have the witness in themselves. Lighten our darkness, O Lord!

3. *By its announcing tribulations to come.* God only can tell the sorrows, pains, and harassment which will be imposed on any sinners; and Ezekiel may see written on the roll those future sufferings which men could not foresee. The Israelites did suffer in their native land, and if sin had been its own punishment, the punishment would assuredly have ended there. But it did not, and they were deported into foreign countries in order to be visited there also for their rebelliousness. Sin is not its own avenger. The evils which follow it are signs of God's rule. He manifests His righteous character, and His determination to govern the world in righteousness. In due places and at fit times He will make His utter abhorrence of wrong to appear. He is never at a loss where to strike, or whom. "We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth," and that all suffering among the peoples of the world to-day are in accordance with His purposes of old. He is fulfilling them before our eyes, though we cannot compare them with predictions of them, as Ezekiel and Israel could. "The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble."

II. **As the commission is accompanied with power to fulfil it.** The book-roll was not handed to Ezekiel with the guarantee of priests or church, nor from the archives of the Temple. It was from the Lord Himself. Ezekiel may gather from this fact—

1. *That there would be new revealings of the rule of the Lord.* He had not exhausted all methods for characterising the proceedings and the destinies of men. Fresh conditions, such as those in which His chosen people were found, opened up the occasion by which He could unfold distincter views of His just and good will. It might be said that all He can show must be already indicated; but Israel would not, or could not, read the logical conclusions implied in the law and the prophets. They needed further teaching, and God is no miser with His knowledge and wisdom. He freely would impart to all; He never binds Himself to use only established institutions, and thus does He the more thoroughly bring His word to the platform from which all classes hear. We expect more light, even with a knowledge of His will far beyond that which Ezekiel could receive; and in presence of novel conditions of science, politics, ecclesiastical developments, we should be on the outlook for further manifestations of Christ, "who is the power of God and the wisdom of God." If it be said that the Book of Revelation is closed now, it should not be said that wider and distincter views of Revelation are also shut out. We must welcome the better things which the Lord will spread before us.

2. *That there would be sensitiveness to receive fuller knowledge.* Nature had presented to Ezekiel its storms and lights and animal forms actuated by one controlling force, and he had been deeply moved; but no special message was there of which he could say, "This is for me alone." Now there is, not Ezekiel's case only, but myriads of other cases attest that the Spirit of the living God does speak to human consciences with the old appeal, "Thou art the man!" He will not let His Word miss its opportunities. He singles out one and another on the ground of their competence to obey Him; and if there be a single person who has no sense of God being near

and bringing something to him personally, it is because he or she is shutting the ear "lest they should hear with their ears and understand with their hearts." For "the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart." God opens the door of faith, and men may enter in and receive that which flesh and blood could not give, but which He can.

3. *That this knowledge would be assimilated to his thoughts and ways.* Ezekiel has to eat the book. It is not that he is merely to learn its meaning, but it is that he is to make all its words his own. He is to "inwardly digest" them, that they may obtain a form suitable to his character and environment. The Lord imparts them so that they shall be turned into bone and muscle for prophetic tasks. Thus they will be psychologically the prophet's own representation, and yet prepared by divine energy to convey an adequate idea of what the people must hear from the mouth of the Lord. This power to take and eat the book symbolises the truth that, without having thus assimilated the words of God, no one ought to teach and preach. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Certainly no one will live for ever who does not eat of the bread of life which Christ gives. The word of hearing does not profit if not mixed with faith, but when with the heart man believeth, then will fruit be borne. God knows our need; He gives power to the faint, and "in Christ strengthening we can do all things." This is "true inspiration. The divine does not remain as a strange element in the man; it becomes his own feeling thoroughly, penetrates him entirely, just as food becomes a part of his bodily frame" (*Umbreit*).

III. As the commission produces satisfaction with itself. Ezekiel had the sweet experience that he was called by God to serve Him, and found it eminently pleasant to "know no will but His." This experience follows on complete submission to all that He gives us to know of Himself. Once taught of God, we should have no doubts and no reserves. Men's commissions often disappoint, because power to carry them out is not welded into them. God never lets His workers go on their own charges; He is prepared to supply all their need. Let them but be consecrated to Him, present their bodies as a living sacrifice, take all the strength and love which Jesus has for them, and they will be enabled to exclaim, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, for Christ's sake." To be used for the Lord will be a sweeter experience than we shall find elsewhere. Even if we have to tell of painful and woful things, we shall do so, knowing that we are not acting on the promptings of our own temper, not serving our own desires, but obeying "the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, who will by no means clear the guilty." Come what may in our life-service, a little or a great duty, one to which we run or one from which we shrink, we shall surely be able to say, as Jeremiah did, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; for I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts."

(3.) Ratifications of the Commission (Chap. iii. 4–15).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 5, 6. "Of a strange speech and of an hard language." The marginal reading, *deep of lip and heavy of tongue*, indicates that nothing is referred to here about the characteristics of national languages. It is the obscurity and embarrassment of a foreign speech, to a man who cannot employ them, which are brought to view. Ezekiel is to speak no tongue but that of Israel. His sphere is definite and contracted. He will be able to give his whole attention to the meaning rather than to the vocal sounds of the words in which he declares the messages of the Lord, and must aim that his people thoroughly understand the words he uses. "They would have hearkened to thee." The obstacle meeting the prophet, if he spoke in the words of the Lord to the heathen, would be their language. When he speaks to the Israelites, it is their

hardness of heart. Familiarity with religious words often counteracts their power.

Ver. 9. "**As an adamant.**" A very hard stone of some kind. We may doubt if it be a diamond, as in Jer. xvii. 1; but it signified to Ezekiel that he would be made more than a match for the contumacy of Israel. He would be neither shamed, nor terrified, nor put down before his rebellious people.

Ver. 12. "**The Spirit,**" the same which moved in the living creatures, "**took me up,**" or, as in ver. 14, "**lifted me up.**" He had been standing on his feet, but now there came a feeling as if he were raised from the ground and about to be removed from the spot at which he had seen "*visions of God.*" Just as he was turned, "**I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing**"—a sound of loud and commingled noises, but not that, as in our Bible, they only conveyed the cry, "**Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place.**" *The appearance of the glory of the Lord* was to be withdrawn for a season from the sight of Ezekiel, but wherever it might be, resting or moving, he was to know that matter for praise and honour must belong to it. It is not said who gave forth this doxology; but as the only articulate voice mentioned is (chap. i. 28) that of Him who is on the sapphire throne, the voice would appear to have proceeded from thence, and so clearly that it could be distinguished from the other accompanying sounds, which Ezekiel goes on to specify. Ver. 13. The sound of great rushing was caused also by "**the noise of the wings of the living creatures**"—when flying, the wings touched one the other, as was intimated chap. i. 24—"**and the noise of the wheels.**"

Ver. 14. "**I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit.**" He was depressed and also excited. He felt his own insufficiency, and in a glow of indignation regarding the work he had to do. He went straight to it, for he was mastered by the mighty hand. His state was akin to that of Paul (1 Cor. ii. 3, 4), "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling; and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Under the hand of the Lord Ezekiel went into society.

Ver. 15. **Tel-abib,** the place near which, probably, Ezekiel's home was; but instead of living in comparative seclusion, he was required to lay himself open to his fellow-exiles. "**And I sat where they sat.**" There is a difficulty in the Hebrew of this clause. The way of solving it which is taken by the English Bible is that suggested by ancient Jewish critics. The Septuagint has another way, by leaving out "and," and rendering the other words, "*those who were there.*" Some later commentators prefer a slightly different Hebrew punctuation, and translate, "*and I saw them dwelling there;*" while others give this version, "*and where they were dwelling there*"—a version perhaps the least open to objections—"**I remained astonished**"—stunned. Ezra ix. 3, 4, indicates that Ezekiel's posture was that of a man who does not move by reason of his emotion and infirmity. There follows continuous silence for "**seven days,**" not as a fixed time for mourning, but as a period of purification and probation for appointed services (Lev. viii. 33).

This paragraph conveys to Ezekiel the purport of the order he had carried out in eating the roll. There are repetitions of matters which had already been communicated to him, but they are applied to a somewhat altered condition. The sight of the glory of the Lord, the summons to serve this God of Glory, the consent to do as he was instructed, are followed up by the command to go and do the service in the allotted sphere. Thus in later days Andrew, Peter, Philip followed Jesus of Nazareth before they were called by Him to become fishers of men. And in our days it is not enough to look to Christ and feel inclination to take up a portion of work for Him; men and women need to get the opportunity which is furnished by the Lord opening a door. By this He ratifies His own call.

HOMILETICS.

I. The adaptedness of God's messages (vers. 4–6).

1. *They are transmissible by means of words.* Man's language and thought are bound to each other by coherent links. Given words will suggest ideas correspondent to them, and so men can understand what the purport of a message is. The fact that God is on another plane than His creatures is not an obstacle to His communicating with them, if He choose to do so. But it is impossible for them to perceive His method of doing so. Yet it carries a self-evidencing power, and true men can unhesitatingly say, "Thus saith the Lord." Mysteriousness does not invalidate consciousness. We may eat the fruit though we cannot tell how the tree produced it from soil and atmosphere.

2. *They are translatable into every tongue of men.* It may be rude or cultivated, that of Israel or of a heathen nation, no matter which, all men are His offspring and capable of receiving what God wishes to let them know. His children, scattered abroad over the earth—Cretans and Arabs, Indians and Negroes—hear in their own tongues wherein they were born the wonderful works of God. "He will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

3. *They suppose competent messengers.* A fit messenger will speak in the language of the people to whom he conveys the words of God. To repeat them in a dead language, or in a foreign language, or in the hard, unusual terms of a vernacular, is to go against the desire of God that all people should understand His will. Preachers and teachers should aim to employ language which will produce the clearest and most widespread impression of what God has given for their hearers. It was a characteristic of our perfect Exampler that "the common people heard Him gladly." He should be copied in this, if possible, by all who would speak for the Father.

4. *They do not compel acceptance.* It may be no discredit to one who is endeavouring to do spiritual good to men that he is not attended to. He may speak precious truths in vain, and that not because of the unsuitableness of his message, but because of the state of those who hear. Like his Lord, he may feel grieved because of the hardness of their hearts. He makes his appeal to those whose eyes the god of this world has blinded—"who love the darkness rather than the light"—who are as free to reject as to accept the words of the Lord. But while believing this, let all who speak His words be sure that they state them as they ought, and then, if they are not hearkened to, they will be free from blame for their unsuccess—they will sorrow over the sad fact that it is God who is not hearkened to.

5. *They are partial in their diffusion.* There are tribes and nations which have not received any special messages regarding the glory and grace of the God and Father of their spirits. "His ways are past finding out." It is sometimes said that if the servants of God had been more devout and enterprising, such a condition of ignorance as to the true God would not have remained. There is a certain amount of truth in this representation; but it would be an error if we let that aspect alone be regarded. We have this also to notice, that behind it there is the mightier and more mysterious fact that God has not commissioned messengers to go to certain peoples, who yet, if He had done so, would have embraced His messages! "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." We are dumb with silence. We can only wait, believing that "He doeth all things well."

II. Sufficient grace proffered (vers. 7–11).

1. *To meet foreshadowed difficulties.* The Lord is wishful that His servants should not be surprised at hindrances. Their first impression generally is, that, having become obedient to the Almighty One, He will make a clear way for them to walk in. That impression is not caused by anything He has said or omitted to say. He knows how the consciences of men will deal with His righteous claims and turn themselves away from hearing the law; so He urges His people to count the

cost of serving Him, to expect rebuffs and disappointments. Then, if they fail to win men, God will have prepared them for just such an event. They need not be cast down, however painful their trials; they must act on His authority, though they have to make a hard, determined advance.

2. *To enable to stand firm.* For all such failures God will bestow surpassing strength. If the rejecters are obstinate, He will make His servants more tenacious than they. He will "give a mouth and wisdom, that all their adversaries will not be able to gainsay or resist." They go forth with precious promises from "a faithful Creator." He does not pledge Himself to give them comforts or converts —He does pledge Himself to give "mercy to the faithful." Jeremiah heard Him say, "They shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee, for I am with thee to deliver thee." Suspicious and angry looks may confront us, but they will not dismay us, for the Lord is at our right hand. "God so wishes sometimes His servants to acquiesce in His government that they should labour even without any hope of fruit. Therefore let us learn to leave the event in the hand of God when He enjoins anything upon us. It ought to suffice us that our obedience is pleasing to Him."—*Calvin.*

3. *To maintain unbroken communion.* His words remain with His people. His Spirit is ever bringing to their remembrance the things He hath spoken. Ready to receive Him, they find a spring opened on every parched pathway—something fitted to sustain them in all duties and discouragements. It will be from their own negligence, or fear, or unbelief, that they will lose the light of His countenance. "The same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and is no lie; and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him."

4. *To promote conduct correspondent to His assurances.* "He giveth grace upon grace." "To him that hath shall be given;" and intimation is made to Ezekiel that He expects: (1.) *Acknowledgment of His authority.* From Him alone is it derived. No man, no ordinance, no institution can convey the power to receive God's words to any person. Every claim to possessing such power is baseless, since He claims that it belongs to His own inworking, and is communicated to whomsoever He chooses. Men can truly speak with a "Thus saith the Lord," but it is because they have been "called" of God, and have bowed to that call. Such men may preach boldly, for they will be warranted to believe that they do so through the power of Christ speaking in them. (2.) *Unwavering adherence to His word of truth.* There must be no compromises with selfish and worldly thoughts. Whether the truth is listened to approvingly or carelessly, whether it is acquiesced in or utterly rejected, no part of it is to be concealed—"all my words"—no part is to be mutilated, for He who speaks is "the Lord God." The rain cometh down from heaven and falls on soil which absorbs it, or on flinty rocks which throw it off, so is the word which proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord. "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord."

III. Appointment to labour for God (vers. 12–15).

1. *By the energy of the Spirit.* He knoweth the deep things of God, and is able to show where, when, and how His servants must go to speak from His mouth. It cannot be an impossible duty to be "filled with the Spirit:" it cannot be a special duty for a few amongst those who obey the Lord: one in the lowliest sphere may receive this "unspeakable gift" as assuredly as one in the most conspicuous sphere; and, supplied with the Spirit, all believers in Jesus will hear His voice calling them into His footprints, and act for His glory in all ways. They will learn to prosecute His interests, and not their own, wherever He leads them. Not by desire for a position amongst men, not for "filthy lucre," not for success will they be led amongst acquaintances or strangers. They will go to be "a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish." Sanctified by the Holy Spirit, they will speak in His mighty power.

2. *In the face of soul-reluctances.* The circumstances into which the Spirit lifts

the children of God are not always agreeable to them. Nothing promising may appear, their opportunities may be few and contracted, or the people may be apathetic and scornful. Not despondency only, but chagrin may infest the hearts of those whom He has "chosen for Himself, that they might show forth His praise." They are disposed to murmur that they are not kindly treated by being appointed to such a work, or are not qualified to face the difficulties, and, with more pity for themselves than trust in the Lord, to exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Alas! in such "bitterness of spirit" there may be the result of misapprehension of the ways of God and irritation against them. Our only security against mistakes and disobedience is in obtaining the gift of power—in the hand of the Lord being strong upon us. Under it we may have a masterful experience like that of Paul, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." We shall bear the strain, however we may feel as if we could cry, "Send by whom Thou wilt send, but not by me."

3. *With sufficient upholding.* "All the need" of those who have given themselves up to the rule of God has a guaranteed supply. Their weakness, fear, and much trembling do not exhaust it. They will not long falter, and will not retreat, because they "go in the strength of the Lord God." They will bear the heat and burden of their day of labour, because "greater is He that is for them than all that can be against them."

4. *Affected by strange hindrances.* A wide door and effectual was opened before Ezekiel, but disablement and silence formed his first experiences upon entrance thereunto. Peter is to be converted before he can strengthen his brethren. Paul has to go into Arabia before he is fit to be a chosen vessel unto the Lord. Many a later Christian has found unexpected obstacles interfering with the service to which he believed himself called by his Master. Weak health, uncertainty what first to do, severe temptations and doubts have appeared obstructing his devotedness. Sometimes he is inclined to give up or let despondency unman him. But no: he has to hope in God, for he will yet praise Him for the help of His countenance. He must sow the good seed of the kingdom, if he can; if he cannot, he must wait till God tells him to go and work in the field. All delay, all pain, all inability to do what we hoped to do have purposes which will not really hinder "the end of the Lord." "All things work together for good to them that love God" and to the interests of His righteousness and salvation amongst men.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Communication from God.—He can have His infinite and, at the same time, His finite side of being. He has His own eternal thought, and can also think, and does constantly think, the thoughts of time. He is all-knowing, and, therefore, more intimately present in our souls, yea, spiritually nearer to us, we may say, than we are to ourselves. He knows us not by media, by signals outward or interior, not by induction from effects or by foreknowledge from causes, but by direct and immediate presence, even by spirit-pervading, interpenetrating spirit. He can think our thoughts as we think them, feel our feelings as we feel them, know our knowledge as we know it; if He cannot do this, then are there deep places in His universe of soul unknown to Him as they truly are. If He can do this, then he can make a revelation in language, in any language, in any actions, signals, symbols, in any outward representations, in any inward affections of the soul, in any finite way. If God thus comes down to us, we see reason why He should adopt that style of speech which is the most outward, the most phenomenal, and, therefore, the most universal. It is the language of the Infinite speaking through media to the human mind, even as one unseen human soul speaks to another human soul through the outward undulations of the air. The words and images are specially selected and specially arranged with reference to the wants of our human race in their peculiar moral history. The words are not outwardly spoken to the prophet's ears or telegraphically signalled to his imagining sensorium. They are, psychologically, the prophet's words, the prophet's images, yet still none the less specially designed through the linked media of revelation, as the very best possible words, the best possible imagery through which such an approximate communication of the ineffable could be made to human minds. Let us be thankful for every type, for every metaphor, for every impassioned appeal, for every instance of the divine condescension

in coming down to us, taking the scale of our thoughts, and speaking to us in our own human emotions, our own human conceptions, as well as in our own human words.—*Lewis.* No man by searching could ever comprehend the glories of a sunrise. Only as the sun, coming up from behind the hills of the morning, reveals himself, could we know what morning is. And so only as God, moving up by a law of motion inherent and undiscoverable, lifts Himself into the horizon of man's observation, can man know what God is. All we know of God, therefore, we know because of revelation made of Himself by Himself.—*Murray.* Nearer than "the next street," even nigh to our spirits within, and yet above us high as heaven is above the earth, is God felt to be when the words of [prophets and] apostles address themselves "to every man's conscience in the sight of God." While not rejecting the thought of exceptional dealings amounting to the miraculous, my faith acknowledges as *normal*, and underlying all hope in preaching as all responsibility in hearing, a true inward divine teaching in the Spirit, enabling him who is yielded to i , and in the measure in which he is yielded to it, to understand and welcome revelation.—*Macleod Campbell.*

The evil religious condition.—In the national spirit and character prevalent in any age, every member of the nation without exception has a share. Every one contributes to this spirit, not only when as a child of the age he is infected, if not by all, yet by one or other of the sins universally diffused; but also when, through neglect of energetic protest, admonition, correction, and punishment, he does not meet it with opposition sufficiently decided. But sinful acts, manifold and widely ramified, point back to sinful tendencies, of which they are manifestations. There is nothing external without an internal counterpart. At the root of illegal acts lies the illegal condition. . . . God's eye pierces to the heart, and His lips of truth describe the sinful tendency as already a sinful act, a transgression of that law of His which requires obedience of heart and inclination.—*Philippi.*

Submission.—What we can help and what we cannot help are on two sides of a line which separates the sphere of human responsibility from that of the Being who has arranged and controlled the order of things. The divine foreknowledge is no more in the way of delegated choice than the divine omnipotence is in the way of delegated power. The Infinite can surely slip the cable of the finite if it choose to do so.—*Holmes.* It is absolutely necessary that, in activity as in rest, you should not only support the idea of God, but that it should be welcome to you; that you should feel the need to blend it with everything; that it should not disturb but complete your life. If it were not so, God would not be to you what He ought to be, nor would you be to Him what you ought; in both cases your life would be mutilated, false, absurd.—*Vinet.* Every time Jesus had to act or speak He first effaced Himself, then left it to the Father to will, to think, to act, to be everything in Him. Similarly, when we act or speak, we must first efface ourselves in presence of Jesus; and after having suppressed in ourselves, by an act of will, every wish, every thought, every act of our own self, we are to leave it to Jesus to manifest in us His will, His wisdom, His power. With Jesus the believer holds direct communication, and through Him alone we find and can possess *the living Father.*—*Godet.*

Receptiveness to truth.—I must have my spirit brought into contact with the quality and character and reality of truth, so as to be affected by it in accordance with its proper nature. All spiritual truth is addressed to the conscience in man, and is understood only by the conscience; and if the conscience is not in action, the truth is to him like light grasped by the hand instead of received by the eye. A grammarian or logician is apt to forget that there may be meaning in the words or reasonings which require the co-operation of another faculty. All spiritual truth is of inspiration, and speaks to what is of the nature of inspiration within man. All that God speaks to us through others, or from without, is intended to make us better apprehend what He is speaking to each in the secret of His being.—*Erskine.*

Prescience of God.—It cannot but seem to us a higher perfection to know all things at once than gradually to arrive to the knowledge of one thing after another, and so proceed from the ignorance of some things to the knowledge of them; and that nothing is more certain than that all possible perfection must agree to God: so we find His own word asserting to Him that most perfect knowledge which seems to exclude the possibility of increase. It is not impossible to assign particular instances of some or other most confessedly wicked actions, against which God had directed those ordinary means of counselling and dehorting men, and which yet it is most certain He did foreknow they would do; as Ezekiel was directed to speak to the revolted Israelites with God's own words to warn and dehort them from their wicked ways.—*Howe.*

Differing results from truth.—It is from no fault inherent in the earth that it enables the upas-tree poison to be eliminated from the same soil that gives us the bread of life. The tree elaborates deadly essences through an organism and chemistry of its own—a devil in the tree—so the heart of man misuses the good things of God.—*W. M. W.*

Independence.—Warm your body by healthful exercise, not by cowering over a stove. Warm your spirit by performing independently noble deeds, not by ignobly seeking the sympathy of your fellows.—*Thoreau.*

To feel, to think, to do only the holy right,
To yield no step in the awful race, no blow in the fearful fight.—*Anon.*

There is tonic in the things that men do not love to hear, and there is damnation in the things that wicked men love to hear. Free speech is to a great people what winds are to oceans and malarial regions, which waft away the elements of disease and bring new elements of health; and where free speech is stopped, miasma is bred and death comes fast.—*Beecher.* Find, in every stress of spiritual fortune, in every hour of supreme exposure to evil, in every time of assault from wickedness, find your resources within yourselves; not *of* yourselves, but *within* yourselves. Too many people have an outside God. What they need, what the world needs, is, as Paul said, "Christ *in* you the hope of glory."—*Murray.*

Inspiration.—As the water with which we water the seed sown in the ground does not create the plant which grows out of it, but stimulates the development of the organs which had previously been formed in the germ and sets their power in action, so the Holy Spirit does not substitute Himself for the individuality of the sacred author. He awakens his faculties, He groups his experiences, He places him in immediate contact with salvation, and by that means confers upon him a special gift—the distinct intuition of that aspect of gospel truth which answers most specially to his own character and needs. The pole which attracted the sentiment or intelligence of each writer was not situated for all at the same point on the sphere of revelation.—*Godet.*

Moral government.—Who shall not aim at the same end at which God aims in revealing the gospel—that end to which creation, providence, laws, precepts, ordinances, grace, reason, conscience, revelation, everything else is subservient—*right moral action* in principle and practice? Who shall not use the same means for this end which God uses—that truth or system of truth which is imbedded in His perfect moral government—which ever places man in the attitude of an agent, teaching his dependence on God only as a reason for acting and doing? Who shall not aim to make the same impression on the human mind which God aims to make by His commands to act, His exhortations to act, His invitations, His entreaties to act, thus throwing every iota of responsibility for the issues of eternity on man as an agent—*for what he does*, for the deeds done in the body? God's revealed moral government, the glorious gospel of the blessed God, is by Him designed and fitted, not to hold a world of moral beings like this in the slumbers of spiritual death, but to rouse and move and stir them to the instant, the ceaseless, the joyous activities of that spiritual life which is the only and absolute perfection of a spiritual being.—*Taylor.*

Spirit and matter.—All life, individual as well as universal, has, as its ground of origination and subsistence, as its root and its link, God's λογος and God's πνευμα. Everything lives and moves and subsists, closely united and reciprocally attracted in one element—in Him. "As an army is organised by its general, and is arranged according to his plan of battle, even so are banded together the starry hosts and the groups of atoms according to the will of one Eternal Spirit. This creating and ordaining Spirit pervades every cell, generates and regulates the flight of every working bee, according to the eternal purpose of the whole. . . . That which generates the galvanic current in the most opposed elements of the voltaic pile; that which gives the living weapon of defence to the electric eel, by the contact of moist heterogeneous parts; that which inclines the magnetic needle to the north—precisely the same creative principle orders and controls the whole fabric of the world, creates and vitalises the organic cell, arranges the intercourse between spirit and matter." Above the material stands the power as the material of materials; above the power stands life as the power of powers; above life stands the spirit as the life of life; above all spirits stands God as the Spirit of spirits, and there is no solution for the enigma of the reciprocal action of all things but this all-effecting and pervading chief monad, which unites all contraries in itself and through itself.—*Delitzsch.*

Self-sacrifice.—The completest self-sacrifice gives the completest self-possession; only the captive soul which has flung her rights away has all her powers free; simply to serve, under instant orders of the living God, is the highest qualification for command. This is the meaning of that great saying of Cromwell's, "One never mounts so high as when one knows not whither one is going"—a saying which the wise and prudent scorned as a confession of blindness, but which reveals to simpler minds the deepest truth.—*Martineau.*

Waiting.—God has so arranged the chronometry of our spirits that there shall be thousands of silent moments between the striking hours.—*Martineau.* She accepted it all absolutely, unconditionally. The past never confused the present: her life went on from moment to moment, from step to step, as naturally as plants grow and flower. She said, "I think there are lighthouses all along our lives, and God knows when it is time to light the lamps."—*Anon.*

Let tongue rest and quiet thy quill be!
Earth is earth and not heaven, and never will be.
Man's work is to labour and leaven—
As best he may—earth here with heaven.
'Tis work for work's sake that he is needing;
Let him work on and on as if speeding
Work's end, but not dream of succeeding;
Because if success were intended,
Why, heaven would begin ere earth ended.—*Browning.*

II.—THE ENTRANCE BY EZEKIEL ON THE EXECUTION OF HIS COMMISSION. CHAPS. III. 16—VII.

Ezekiel had been fully accredited, but did not begin his work as a messenger of the Lord when he was sent among the people. He remained in their midst, silent and astonied—stunned—for a season. Then came instructions, conveying distinct intimation of the responsibilities of his position, of the thraldom in which he would be held, and thereto the first communications for the people followed.

1. RESPONSIBILITIES ILLUSTRATED (Chap. iii. 16–21).

EXEGETICAL NOTES. Ver. 16. "**At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came.**" The power to prophesy is not inherent in man. It is not produced by his agency. It comes and goes according to occult influences which do not obliterate the mental condition of the recipient. Rather they enter into such correlation with him as to enhance his susceptibility for what is divine, and are always in a certain correspondence with constitutional ability, circumstances, acquirements of the person on whom they operate.

Ver. 17. "**I have made**"—given—"**thee a watchman.**" This shows to Ezekiel how he is to think of himself in the work appointed. He is, as it were, to cover with his eyes the objects placed under his view, and to take action in correspondence with their appearances. He is to look, search, announce or denounce. The watchman is thus closely allied to the seer—only this is the passive state of which the former is the active. "**Unto the house of Israel.**" Not as an organic unity, but as made up of individuals, part of whom are wicked and part righteous, and the prophet is to inspect carefully the marks which are traceable on each so as to impart appropriate warnings. "**Hear the word at my mouth.**" He is not to produce his own opinions, or to state that which may agree with the opinions of the people; he is to stand in the light of pure truth and goodness and tell its manifestations. "**Give them warning.**" Be not a lecturer on history or business; do not sit as a professor to set forth the doctrines that are to be accepted as credible; spend not your time in making up complaints for the people about their distresses as captives in a foreign land. Show that the real evil is in themselves, not in their environment; rouse up a conviction of danger to them so long as they cherish any delusion as to external relationship to the Lord God, if they are disregarding His laws. The future is ominous with storms, and they will be struck down if they follow the ways of their own heart. "**From me.**" It is I who warn. I speak to thee and use thy capabilities. Take a fearless message, for I am with thee. Do not travesty the sketch I intrust thee with by inserting colours which I warn thee not to put there.

Ver. 18. "**When I say unto the wicked.**" God comes into personal communication with transgressors when His servant delivers His message faithfully. "**Thou shalt surely die.**" The identical threat against the first sinner (Gen. ii. 17) is valid throughout all generations. In every world sin is death as contrasted with life. "**Nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way.**" Once to give warning is not to fulfil the charge devolving on the prophet. There are to be repetitions and perhaps private appeals. The representations are to be made, moreover, against both the man and his doings; for there are sin and sins—an evil disposition and exhibitions thereof. "**To save his life.**" The purpose of the Lord in speaking to the wicked man is to bestow life upon him—not merely to put a stop to iniquity. He hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked. If life is not secured he "**shall die in his iniquity,**" in the sins he has committed; so he will bring the

penalty upon himself; "**but his blood will I require at thine hand.**" His blood is typical of his life, and He, whose are all souls, will take a reckoning for that life towards the loss of which a guilty negligence has contributed.

Ver. 19. "**Yet if . . . he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way;**" if he do not repent—change his mind and conduct; "**thou hast delivered thy soul:**" thou wilt stand clear of any accusations of having dealt unfaithfully in thy office. In later times Paul was able to say, "I am pure from the blood of all men."

Ver. 20. A parallel case to that of the wicked is now illustrated, but having reference to a righteous man. It is supposed that "**a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness.**" He does not show a simple weakness in obeying, but a disposition to evil. He yields his members to "**commit iniquity, and I lay—*give*—a stumblingblock before him.**" God tempteth not any man, but He arranges the circumstances of men so that an evil heart finds occasion to assert its power, and to draw from the paths of righteousness into the ways of sin. Thus gold and silver (chap. vii. 19), and a regard for sensuous worship (chap. xiv. 4, 7), affected the Israelites so that they stumbled. Pharaoh is an illustration of an individual, under providential events, becoming hardened against the good and holy will of the Lord (Exod. vii. 3, 22, viii. 15). "**Because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin.**" The watchman will be counted guilty of negligence, but his neglect will not excuse the sin of the wanderer from righteousness. That will bring death. "**And his righteousness,**" his external habits and actions, which, "touching the righteousness which is in the law," were blameless, "**shall not be remembered,**" they shall be regarded as if they had never been.

Ver. 21. On the other hand, "**if thou warn the righteous man that the righteous sin not;**" or, *if thou warn the righteous not to sin as a righteous man, i.e.*, as professing to have a character which is unspotted by iniquity, and he is confirmed in his right standing by your words, "**thou hast delivered thy soul.**"

Thus Ezekiel learns the principles by which he is to be moved in carrying on the office of a watchman. Incidentally the procedure of the divine government, in respect to moral character, is indicated, but that is a subject deferred to chaps. xviii. and xxxiii. more especially.

HOMILETICS.

God's call to service is a trust (vers. 16, 17).

Such a call may be *special* and capable of being distinctly realised, as by Ezekiel; or it may be *general* and only its principles appreciated, as by those on whom wishes to do good, vague aspirations, dreams, impressive events have been operating; but whatever be the method in which the call is made, its character as a trust is never altered.

I. Its features as relating to God show this.

1. *The call is conveyed by God.* He can act on the human will through any one of the faculties which affect it. Prepared eyes can see visions of God, as did Ezekiel, Paul and others; sensitive ears can perceive the sounds of His voice, as did Isaiah, John, and others. He uses the means for producing clear views of duty, more or less definite desires and purposes, firm resolves; and whether these tend towards prophesying, preaching, teaching in families or schools, directing the sickly or dying, they who experience them should receive them as coming from the Father of Lights, the Ruler of all events. They may be recognised, so far as they issue from Him, as sent by Him, though the recipients should not have "heard His voice at any time or seen His shape." The labourers go to work in His vineyard at the hour in which He finds them idle. The child of a godly mother responds

to His impulse with, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant." An apostle affirms, "A dispensation of the gospel is committed to me."

2. *It is concerned with the truth of God.* His truth contains knowledge for the wayfaring man, guidance for the lost, bread for the hungry, healing for the wounded, life for the dead in sins—who will dare to smother its virtue? Let the methods of the call be what they may, the work is to be begun and continued in simple acquiescence to that which He reveals. He will not allow another standard. No herald, soldier, minister should think of modifying the terms in which a government made a declaration of war or a proffer of peace to another government. Less reasonable is it to affect to modify the terms which the mighty God may instruct His servants to bear. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men." His words are perfectly and always true. One man's mind may apprehend them somewhat differently from that of another man, one speaker proclaim them less vigorously than another; but, in any case, the truth in Jesus must not be departed from, must not be tampered with; it must be set forth as His.

3. *Its contents are meant for all hearers.* Ezekiel is appointed watchman, not for some individuals or for some sections of his people, but for the whole house of Israel. The Lord of the spirits of all flesh has teachings for the young and adult, for poor and rich, for wicked and righteous, and it is not for those whom He calls to be His messengers to alter or prescribe limitations to the reach of His words. He may endow one with a gift suited for children, and another with that adapted to the rough or the cultured, and a third with that fitted for the unconverted or believers; each is to use his gift in the distinct understanding that the truth of God is applied to specific conditions. Underlying this conviction of the adaptation of God's word to each person should be the strong living thought that the whole world lies within the scope of the divine holiness and love. In our own houses, or outside of them, there are those for whom His food is prepared, and are we not to distribute it? "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise."

II. **Its features in those who are called show this.**

1. *In reference to the messages they receive*, there is to be: (1.) *A consistent impressibleness to their power.* His servants must stand in living and persistent regard to God. Creeds, catechisms, systems, churches, and ecclesiastical assemblies of all kinds, are as likely to interfere now between Him and the single-mindedness of those whom He sends forth, as was manifested by the old priesthood, of whom it was said, "Ye have caused many to stumble at the law." We need to abide with the Holy Spirit, so that the truths already learned of Christ should retain as fresh a divine power over us as truths which may have been newly given to us; we should seek for the ability to link on the one to the other, so as to be "perfect and complete in all the will of God" whensoever we speak for Him. (2.) *A readiness to accept more.* Ezekiel had seen the glory of the Lord and been lifted up by the Spirit, but he is to expect further revelations. None have such abundance of light and impulse for service that they need no more. They have not yet attained. The glory and grace of the Only-begotten cannot be comprehended in a lifetime. Our minds must receive the mould which is suited to our Lord's own promise, "To him that hath shall be given."

2. *In reference to the responsibility imposed on the messengers.* They are required: (1.) *To look at things in the light of God.* It is sometimes an object of desire to see the truth of things just as God sees them. Such desire is worse than foolish, whether it relate to our sins or duties. But to ask that we may rightly perceive how either sin or duty stands in view of the Holy One is wise, and fitted to move us toward conformity to the mind of Christ. Many a sailor can satisfactorily tell what he must do with his vessel in a storm, and yet is unable to measure the pressure or the velocity of the wind. And the simplest servants of the Lord may so learn His thoughts and ways as that they shall be practically agreed with God, and

yet be still far from complete knowledge of Him. Nevertheless, practical walking in the light of His countenance is to be maintained continually. (2.) *To tell others what is shown of God.* The spiritual eye and the heart sensitive to His presentations respecting man's procedure and what man should do are not to be unused. They are to be made means of convincing all and judging of all ungodly deeds and righteous efforts. Plainness and faithfulness must be brought to the front. Evasion or compromises are out of place in the service of Him who seeth not as man seeth. The message is from Him, and will be associated with His gracious power working in us to will and do. "If a watchman want eyes and knowledge, how can he discern danger, instruct the ignorant, heal the wounded, reduce the straying, lift up the fallen, feed the hungry, comfort the feeble, resolve conscience, and compare things past with things present and future?"—*Greenhill.*

Postulates for an effective watchman (vers. 18–21).

1. *Discrimination in addressing the people.* He has to act for all, but the wicked are to be spoken to as wicked and the righteous as righteous. Human intelligence may not be capable of distinguishing the inward moral character of persons; that inability must not lead to the confounding of wickedness with righteousness. The warning has to be uttered with all plainness, in reference to disposition or action. The application must be somewhat personal—like that of Nathan to David, "Thou art the man!" The forms of application may be indefinitely varied, but the gist of it will ever define the separation which discriminates "the precious from the vile." The fear or the gentleness which prevents a follower of Christ from making it clear that sin is death—no matter whether the sinning one be poor or rich, a so-called worldly man or a so-called Christian—must be counteracted by the remembrance that "God cannot be mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Preachers and teachers of the gospel may be deficient in some valuable qualifications; they must not be deficient in determination to avoid whatever will lead into a mistake as to moral conduct. They have nothing to learn from the maxim, "Live and let live." They have to hold forth the word of life to those who may be dead in sins, and to those who may have been freed from sin but been tempted to go back to their former master, so that they may know they have not life.

2. *Singleness of aim.* The purpose of God, in calling men to receive and promulgate His messages, is to save from death. He does not want the soul to revise its past records but to make new records. He does not care so much to avert punishment as to repress the tendencies to punishable conduct—to turn from wickedness and wicked ways to righteousness and righteous ways, from death to life. There may be many pleasant results following our religious efforts, yet the labourer must not aim at less than saving the souls alive of those for whom he acts. He is intrusted with that on which depends, not the mere pleasure or comfort or happiness of men, but their lives, and no consideration should be allowed to divert the directness of the aim he is appointed to take.

3. *Certainty of influence.* He who brings the word of the Lord does not work in vain. It may be that he does see results such as he wishes to see, or results such as he most earnestly deprecates should not occur; but the Master sees that he sheds "a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death." Still it can never be matter of indifference to learn what is the influence which is exerted. "When Jesus beheld the city He wept over it." "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." "What is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" How needful to abide under the seriousness of the conviction that we are affecting, for weal or for woe, those with whom, as Christ's servants, we have intercourse, and seek "by all means to save some." "Let us throw the net oft, we may catch fish in a dead sea."

4. *Subordination to God.* He retains in His own power all decisions as to death and life, and His messengers are but instruments for declaring the principles on which He grounds His procedure. He calls them to "be not weary in well-doing"—to be "instant in season, out of season;" but to not one of them does He give a title to pronounce, over the wicked or righteous man, the sentence, "I condemn thee to die. I absolve thee from thy sins." "Who art thou that judgest another?" It is arrogancy and boldness to step into Christ's place, and impose any laws, decrees, or inventions of men upon the consciences of others, or to judge the conditions of men, without warrant from Christ and His Word. Prophets may not do it, much less others. That power is not transferred; the power which He does confer is to declare that God Himself denounces death on the impenitent, that He gives life to those who turn to His ways. He who teaches otherwise does not stand to his appointment as a watchman and travesties the authority which he might rightly wield.

5. *Award according to faithfulness.* Office in the kingdom of God does not screen its holder from the righteous judgment of God if he is negligent in duties. He will reckon with them, both for what has been let alone or unfaithfully carried out, and for what has been attended to and faithfully fulfilled. The day will come when He will announce the reward or woe. Omission of duty may be as fatal as commission of evil—the negligence which does not extinguish a spark may occasion a conflagration as destructive as that which intentional malice may cause. How earnestly is the question to be pondered: Do we watch for souls as they that must give account, that we may do it with joy and not with grief?

Laws for judging moral conduct (vers. 18–21).

1. *Impartiality will be dealt out.* "There is no respect of persons with God." The righteous man, if he turn to evil, is condemned equally with the wicked man. and a wicked man, if he turn to righteousness, is saved equally with a righteous man. They who have served the Lord cannot expect that He will wink at, or take no account of their transgressions of His law, on the ground that they have been serving Him, just as they whose hearts have been stout against Him are not to suppose that He will be indifferent to the repentings which are kindled in them. They who have begun wrong may turn to righteousness and will be treated as righteous doers, while they who have done right may turn into a wrong way and will be treated as wrong. This rule for moral life has to be looked at without blinking—I am to have sentence passed upon me by the holy God not for what I profess to be, but for what I do.

2. *Judgments proceed according to the direction of conduct.* One step aside does not of itself proclaim that a man has left the way in which he has been walking. His fixed departure is known by the steps which succeed to the first. Those successive steps will result from the disposition of the traveller, and God alone can judge of that. We can see, however, that a first stumble out of the way of righteousness may be the commencement of a new course, which, if followed on, will bring to the way of wickedness. The man, as he verges away, may still wear some of the habits he has used hitherto, and may speak in an idiom often different from that of the country whose frontiers he has crossed over; but he has changed his direction—the light falls upon his back, and his face is becoming more suffused with the darkness towards which he is tending. His case calls for the warning that he has left the right way, and that the end of his movement is death—no matter if he does retain some resemblance of his former gait. A wicked man abides in death not because of one sin, or one class of sins, so much as because he goeth on still in his trespasses—because he "hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

3. *Guiltiness is not transferable.* One's wicked or righteous doing is from himself. No scheme is possible to be devised by which we can transfer our moral

conduct so that it shall be no longer ours. There is no escape from the righteous judgment of God. Circumstances, tempters, preachers can never bear the blame of that which has been perpetrated by our own hearts. We may not have been advised or warned by those whose duty it was to advise or warn us; their failure does not, in any degree, alter the character of the direction we have taken. "Every man must bear his own burden." Ignorance may be a ground for inflicting few stripes upon a disobedient servant, but cannot destroy his obligation to the master. "I never was told" will never be a lever by which we can lift off from ourselves the unrighteousness and the death which is by sin.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Readiness to serve.—It is infinitely sweet and lovely to be the organ and spokesman of the Most High. The most painful divine truths have for the spiritual man a gladdening and quickening side.—*H.*

To my Master I stand or I fall; what to me is the world's acclaim?
I hear not its loud applause, I heed not its bitter blame.
I am not bound by the laws of Herod's judgment-hall,
When it praiseth me, it hath cause;
Yet what it seeth for flaws
It seeth, nor seeth it all.—*Greenwell.*

He shall die.—Christ died to save the world from the curse of death under which it is; not a future death of misery, but an actual death of worse than misery, a death which involves our liking that which is evil. It does not occur to us that to like to be wicked is to be damned. We say that mere wickedness, mere self-indulgence, merely being alienated from God, is not worthy to be called death unless there be misery conjoined with it—that suffering is more to be feared than sinning. In that speaks the death of man. That is death which fears suffering more than sinning. A sinful state is the chief of evils; sinning is damnation; self-indulgence is to be cast into hell; the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched are unbridled passions. To be damned is not to be miserable but to be bad, and Christ is spoken of as saving us from sin, from corruption, from vain conversation, from this evil world, never from pain. It is hard to believe that damnation can be a thing that men like. Corruption is corruption in man's view, though worms like it. Is damnation less damnation in God's view, though men like it? To be loved by a man whom we treat as an enemy is to have coals of fire heaped upon our head. To be loved as God loves us, we being such as we are, is to be cast into a lake of fire. The love of Christ, the sight of God as He truly is, must have power to save men from sin. They learn that sin is damnation and understand their Maker.—*Hinton.*

A wrong direction fatal.—

The painful warrior, famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories once foiled,
Is from the books of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled.—*Shakespeare.*

2. Prophetic Thraldom (vers. 22–27).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—A fresh impulse from the Lord impresses upon Ezekiel another characteristic of his mission. By *eating the roll* he was taught that his words should be those of the Spirit of God; by *being a watchman*, that he must speak boldly and without fear of consequences. Now he is to learn that there is *a time to be silent* as well as *a time to speak*, and that both are appointed by God.—*Speaker's Com.*

Ver. 22. "**The hand of the Lord was there upon me.**" The people amongst whom Ezekiel sat had not been altered by seeing his strange condition, and the divine power, which had impelled him to go to them, now impels him to go from them, "**into the plain,**" or, better, *valley*, as in chap. xxxvii. 1—probably the same depression of ground as this near Tel-abib.

Ver. 23. "**And behold the glory of the Lord stood there.**" The same manifestation of majesty, which had commissioned him, again appears to warrant him to hear, speak, act as His messenger.

Ver. 24. "**Then the Spirit entered into me,**" as the power which enables men to accept communications from the Lord, and which fulfilled the pledge of ver. 22. "**And he spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within**

thine house." Ezekiel was to be a sign unto the people, and here is commanded to do that which would be a symbol to teach them. In ver. 15 he had sat "astonished among them seven days," but he is not to do so again. They are to be taught by the fact that he had withdrawn into the privacy of his own house. Thus isolated he preaches to them through their eyes at any rate.

Ver. 25. "They shall put bands upon thee." This shows that the people had access to the prophet within his house; but it is not to be taken literally. If the "they" refer to the captives, the phrase will express the idea that their rebelliousness would interfere with the prophet's mission and hinder its development—as was illustrated in after-times with respect to the mission of One greater than Ezekiel: "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." But the reference is probably to the procedure of the Lord Himself, since in chap. iv. 8 it is said, "I will lay bands upon thee." Of what efficacy they will be is indicated in the words, "and thou shalt not go out among them." This is not merely a result from the binding, it is rather a command of the Lord. Ezekiel is not to consider himself free to do as he likes. He must confine himself strictly to his house; on no account to sit where his people sit, for to do so would be to obliterate the lesson given by his isolation.

Ver. 26. This lesson is further inculcated by enforced silence. "Thou shalt not be to them a reprover," a man who will endeavour to convict them of their sins, except so far as and how I direct thee. They are not always in a state fit to hear rebukes, "for they are a rebellious house," and nothing effective can be accomplished as yet.

Ver. 27. "When I speak with thee I will open thy mouth." The time to declare the Lord's mind will come, and then Ezekiel must openly and boldly announce what he receives from Him to communicate. It does not seem that this temporary restraint hindered verbal statements about ordinary matters, but only those which came to him in the word of the Lord. His silence or his utterance of the divine message was to be dependent on the express sanction of his Lord. Thus when his tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth, when he cannot speak the words given him by God, if his mouth is opened the words he utters will appear the more distinctly divine. "The divine injunction extends over the whole period which ends in the fulfilment of the prophecies of threatening by the destruction of Jerusalem. This appears especially from this, that in xxiv. 27 and xxxiii. 22 there is an undeniable reference to the silence imposed upon him in our verse, and with reference to which it is said, that when the messenger should bring back the news of the fall of Jerusalem, his mouth should be opened and he should be no longer dumb."—*Keil.*

HOMILETICS.

Restraints in Serving the Lord.

I. They are often experienced. The whole course of the history of the kingdom of God, as traced in the Old Testament, may be pointed to as showing that the godly, whose service is outlined therein, met with recurring impediments to their efforts. The like feature is observed in the New Testament. Every true life for Christ, at one step or another, verifies the expression of Paul, "Without are fightings, within are fears."

1. *The restraints may be in the servants.* They may be ready to spread the gospel, but are forbidden to enter the door which is apparently opened, or are afflicted with disease and unable to enter, or are prostrated in their energies by some domestic event and unfit to enter. In such and similar cases they must not conclude that they have offended the Lord because silence is imposed on them; they are not to write bitter things against themselves; they are to bow in acquiescence and wait till God open their lips.

2. *The restraints may be from those for whom the service is required.* (1.) *They may become violent against the persons who stand up for the rights of God.* A prophet like Jeremiah was "cursed" by every one, and cast into a miry dungeon; an apostle like Paul was mobbed, beaten and imprisoned, and unnumbered injuries have been committed against less-known followers of Him who was crucified by wicked hands. (2.) *Or the people may be rebellious in heart.* It was because of this their state that Ezekiel was shut up and trammelled. The soil, into which the seed of the kingdom was to be cast, had not those elements in it which would act upon and vitalise the germs. The gospel is unproductive in many a sphere, not because it is not plainly and faithfully set forth, but because men are irresponsive and unimpressed. They reject the medicine which would bring them health and cure. Such sad conditions should not prevent further efforts for the redemption of souls, though former ones have been made apparently in vain. We must not repress our longings for a change. We must watch as servants who wait for the Lord.

II. **The restraints are under the direction of the Lord.** He concerns Himself with every matter relating to His kingdom amongst men. The enforced silence and disablement of the prophet and the "gross" heart of the people are controlled for His righteous and good ends.

1. *Traces of His working are perceptible.* Restraints are felt teaching His suffering servants to be patient, vigilant for Him, and so qualifying for future action and future reward. "If we suffer with Him we are glorified together." Also by those restraints the evil which lies in hearts is disclosed. Their enmity to God is elicited. Their hardness becomes more intense. Blinded thus, they lead the blind and "provoke" God to send a famine of His Word. What more deplorable state can a lost traveller be in than that in which he can be no longer tracked by the guides who go in search of him? What more painful illustration of their state can there be than when the wicked and the righteous hear warnings no more?

2. *Hopes of His working may be entertained.* When men make void His law, that is a time to ask God to do special work. The restraints which lie in the prophet's disablement or the people's sin will not always continue to press. God will not be served only by silence. He will open a door of utterance, and again send forth His words to the people that He may prove whether there is yet a heart in them which will take heed how they hear.

III. **Restraints may be associated with communion between the Lord and His servants.**

This fact is brought to pass—

1. *By a fresh consciousness of God in His service.* When His faithful followers are "troubled on every side," they often realise the power of God and the preciousness of Christ; when they are weak, then are they strong through His grace. He seems to come nearer to them, and they say, "Thou holdest me by my right hand."

2. *By a deepened conviction that He who has led them is the same for ever.* Ezekiel is not left to remember that he had seen the glory of the Lord; it is shown to him again. He learns that God is all that He was. The glory of Christ which we see when He is first revealed in us, the glory which moved us to consecrate our lives to Him and His work on earth, that glory will be shown again and again, if we wait for Him. It is not the memory of a first love which is to sustain us in suffering and duty; it is a renewed sight, "day by day." We are prostrated before His glory, but we, beholding that glory, shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory—from the glory of suffering for Christ to the glory of reigning with Christ.

3. *By the power of the Holy Spirit.* He is given to dwell in our body as His temple. He takes the things that are Christ's and shows them to us. He teaches to profit, and we receive power, love, and a sound mind. The efficacy of all true ministry depends on His energy. It is as the servants of the Lord live in the

Spirit and walk in the Spirit that they adequately fulfil the mission to which they are called. And since He is freely and fully promised for the asking—as the gift of a father to his children—what sorrow and shame may not affect us who might have received so much of His power and yet have been satisfied with so little! "Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?"

3. First Instructions by Signs and their Interpretation (Chaps. iv. 1–v. 17).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ezekiel is ordered to carry out certain specified processes. Their purport is expressed by the words (iv. 3), "This shall be a sign to the house of Israel." The use of such signs is partly to be accounted for by the circumstances of a prophet whose dwelling was in a country in which symbolical figures were striking and not unusual; partly by the psychological fact that his actings were to educate the people while as yet his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth. It is a mootpoint with students of prophecy whether to regard all actings of this sort as internal sensations vividly realised, or as taking form externally. "No general principle can be laid down by which to determine how far such actions pertain to the province of the external or internal"—*Oehler*. To say, that all that was commanded to Ezekiel is to be accounted for by the vividness of his mental view, seems to contravene such statements as that he sat astonied seven days; that he removed his goods from one place to another in sight of his people; that he made no mourning for his deceased wife. To say, on the other hand, that all are to be taken literally seems to land us amid insurmountable difficulties, such as that he lay three hundred and ninety days without turning, while he is during that period to make and bake cakes of unprecedented ingredients; and also that he was to burn a third portion of his shaved hair in the midst of Jerusalem, though he was in Tel-abib. We need not be troubled at failing to find a satisfactory decision on this matter. What is of paramount interest is to find the meaning involved in each symbolical act. That that meaning will not be agreed in by every one cannot surprise us. A large element of indefiniteness exists in all symbolism, and men of different dispositions will create images of unlike contour through the haze of the indefiniteness. Nevertheless, thoughts may be expanded, and desires for light and guidance excited and heightened, as well as deadened, by the very uncertainty. Act-symbolism exists under similar conditions as word-symbolism. "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to others in parables." "By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive." With inwrought modesty, and prayers for the opening of our understanding by the Holy Spirit, should all Scripture-symbols be considered.

The four symbolical processes, which Ezekiel is here required to employ, form parts of one whole presented in varying phases. That whole is, Israel given up to punishment for sins. The coincidence of this section with Lev. xxvi. is noteworthy. The most probable explanation thereof is that Ezekiel had thoroughly studied the picture drawn in the law and reproduced its salient features freely.

The siege of Jerusalem symbolised (iv. 1–3).

Ver. 1. "**Take thee a tile,**" or *a brick*, shaped in clay and afterwards dried by the sun or burnt in a fire. Multitudinous specimens, of the kind which Ezekiel was to use, may be seen, in the British Museum, with letters and also warlike scenes depicted on them. "**And pourtray upon it the city,**" or rather *a city*, which is immediately specified as the one least likely, "Jerusalem."

Ver. 2. "**Build a fort against it.**" An instrument of ancient warfare, so con-

structed as to overtop the walls of the besieged place, and so to give opportunity for the besiegers to reach the defenders with their weapons. "And cast a mount against it." Raise an embankment from which to attack advantageously. "And set battering-rams against it round about." Beams suspended so as to be readily driven against the walls. "At Kouynijik there is the monument of the siege of an important city in which no less than seven battering-rams are employed."—*Layard.* The prophet is to regard himself as doing that which he pourtrays on the tile. He acts under commission from God, and so it is the Lord Himself who is to be viewed as operating against Jerusalem by means of the Chaldean army.

Ver. 3. "Take unto thee an iron pan." A common utensil for cooking in the East. It was to be fixed perpendicularly, as "a wall of iron between thee and the city." A separation was thus made between the prophet and the city, and the iron pan symbolised the barrier which had been produced between the Lord and His unfaithful people. "The decree and the sentence of God against them would be rigidly carried out, and God would not hear their prayers and complaints and bend to them in mercy. How far they must have degenerated for Him to deal thus!" "And thou shalt lay siege against it." The siege would be in Ezekiel's lifetime, and by him as acting for the Lord. So it is declared that "this shall be a sign to the house of Israel," *i.e.*, to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, both those in captivity and the remnant still in their native land. In the time of Ezekiel the distinction between the ten tribes and the two tribes was fast disappearing. A trace of its existence is still seen in vers. 5 and 6, but rather as a relic from the past than a reality of the present. When the ten tribes were led into captivity Judah represented *all* Israel, and in the course of time the remainders of the several tribes were amalgamated with Judah. This event is not dimly predicted in Jeremiah's words, "The house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers" (iii. 18). All attempts to show that the lost ten tribes have been found, or hopes that they may be, must be dismissed as based on untenable surmises.

The period of punishment symbolised (iv. 4–8).

Ver. 4. "Lie thou also upon thy left side." The posture which Ezekiel has to assume of lying continuously for a lengthened time on the same side is a picture of the low condition of the people, not only throughout the siege of Jerusalem, but in the whole period of chastisement. The prophet becomes *their* representative here, not, as in vers. 1–3, that of the Lord. In taking that unshifting posture, he must be open to no slight suffering, "and," so it is added, "lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it." He is one of them, and shares the punishment of their guilty conduct for the allotted time—a symbol of penalty, not of expiation. Thus, too, "thou shalt bear their iniquity," is not to be explained as meaning that his action was to signify the forbearance of God while the people were sinning, but the infliction of chastisement because of sins they had committed.

Ver. 5. "For I have laid upon," or I have given, "thee the years of their iniquity according to the number of the days." The Lord had defined the limit of time beyond which the punishment of Israel would not go, and He required the prophet to be subject to the constraint of lying on his left side for the number of days corresponding to the years during which Israel would bear their iniquity. A similar posture was to be taken for Judah.

Ver. 6. "Lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days." Any explanations, referring the three hundred and ninety and the forty days to events which took place before the degradation of the Israelitish people from their national position, are forbidden by the fact that Ezekiel is to exhibit what is to happen. The children are to bear

stripes for the unfaithfulness of their fathers. The duration of the punishment threatened—four hundred and thirty years—is obviously related to the bondage of the chosen people in Egypt and their wanderings in the wilderness. The condition into which they would fall would involve a suffering for their sins comparable to that "hardship and discipline which had of old been laid upon their fathers," and illustrative of the Deuteronomic prediction, "The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again," &c. (Deut. xxviii. 68). Moreover, as the ten tribes had forsaken the worship appointed by their God, in a way that Judah had not, the period of suffering to the former is prolonged far beyond that designated to the latter. But no satisfactory elucidation of the two dates, as exact points of chronology, is forthcoming. It is best, perhaps, to regard both as symbolical of a lengthened time of punishment such as might be paralleled by the servitude in Egypt, and also of a brief term of punishment such as might be compared with the trials of the sojourn in the desert. And while the sojourn in the desert was the passage from slavishness to freedom, from ignorance to knowledge of God's laws, so the privations and calamities befalling Judah for forty years would be an education out of which hope and peace would come. The captive Israelites would thus be taught that only in association with the captive Jews could they look for shortened suffering and following blessing. "I have appointed thee each day for a year." A reference to the judgment passed upon the tribes of Israel for their murmurings on account of the report of the spies. "After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years" (Num. xiv. 34). Thus past history is used to represent the future—what God has done in respect to sins God will do.

Ver. 7. "Thine arm shall be uncovered." The meaning of this figure, drawn from ancient habits in war, may be taken to be that action was to be proceeded with—that the allotted penalties were to be now begun. By this gesture and the preceding actions "thou shalt prophesy against it," *i.e.*, Jerusalem, as representative of the whole house of Israel.

Ver. 8. "Behold I will lay bands upon thee" (cf. iii. 25). It was the Lord who put Ezekiel under constraint, and he could not act as a reprover till his mouth was opened by divine sanction. Was his constraint embodied in some form of disease, first in his left side and then in his right? Was it, like Paul's thorn in the flesh, an "infirmity" which the Lord would not cause to depart? "And," so it is said, "thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another." There will be no averting of the punishment and no relaxation of it, "till thou hast ended the days of thy siege," accomplished the full time of being a sign to Israel.

This paragraph exhibits one of the characteristics of Ezekiel as a prophet, viz., his tendency to describe surrounding and future circumstances by terms and events found in the byegone course of the Lord's people. The fact of his exile, and apparently cast out of the covenant which carried the destinies of Israel, moved him to dwell upon the past dealings of God to such a degree that he thought and felt about all the matters which came before him in the light and forms of preceding times. But this tendency does not warrant us to believe that the present and future should go on in the very grooves in which the past had left its traces: rather it helps us to see that He who had begun His wise and good work for Israel would carry it on without change of direction. Ezekiel is to show that the austere and stern aspects of God had not been obliterated by the years in which He had borne the sins of His people patiently, and that the light of His countenance had not been forever withdrawn because of their failures in obedience to His will. The commentator who would treat Ezekiel's prophecies as if they must be expounded literally and not with great freedom, is least of all likely to unfold their true interpretation. "The eye that can look through the shell into the

kernel may see the future things of God's administration mirrored in the past—not, indeed, the exact copy and image of what is to be, yet its essential character and necessary result."—*Fairbairn.*

HOMILETICS.

God's Action against Iniquities in a People.

I. It is carried on by various agencies. The cloud, the fire, the implements, the composite beings of Ezekiel's inaugurating vision, are all ruled from the sapphire throne, and Ezekiel is made as a central figure round which their operations proceed. By him and in him the Lord shows that pains and disabilities, soldiers and military materials, carry out His will and visit for iniquities. People professing His name must know that there is no such thing as chance, accident, human ambition, or forces apart from His directing word. The operator at the telegraph clock transmits the message which another person hands to him; so Ezekiel or the army of Nebuchadnezzar carries out what the righteous God has decided on. Whether the earth rejoices or trembles, everything that produces the one state or the other is "created" by the Lord who reigneth. For every sin there is not only an adapted penalty but a suitable agency for inflicting the penalty. How many a trouble, in State or Church or individuals, would lose its aspect of incomprehensibleness, if faith would but say, "The Lord is there and He is too wise to mistake."

II. It is resolute. No secondary agent which He employs will fail in executing that whereto He has sent it. Ezekiel is laid under unrelaxing bands till he has fulfilled the time appointed, and the Chaldean forces will be kept persistently besieging Jerusalem till the sacred city is subjugated. The Lord will not be turned aside. He will not stop halfway to what He has purposed to effect. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, men's hearts are fully set in them to do evil;" and should God refrain to strike when His righteousness and mercy have been set at nought, what would happen but that His people would become incredulous as to His sincerity in denouncing sin, and be uninstructed as to its real heinousness in His view? He does not spare the rod because of the mere crying of His children, since His hatred to sin and regard to holiness never change—change what else may. Whatsoever His hand and His counsel determined before to be done against His holy child, Jesus, He will accomplish, even though it be by wicked hands. God is faithful.

III. It is impartial. All who are involved in the common sin are the objects of suffering—rich and poor, free and bond, priest and prophet. Israel was His chosen people, Jerusalem the place where His honour dwelt; but great religious privileges did not shelter them from God's "vengeance" when they neglected and rejected His ways. From the Churches of Christ, from the families of the godly, from private rooms and bended knees men have gone into paths of sin, and shall they escape? No; they shall be overtaken by suffering and woe in some form or other, as certainly, if not more so, than men who never heard of the Christ of God. Boast of being perfect in love, of divine right on your side, if you will; but be sure that no persuasion of sanctity or superiority will avert from you the messengers appointed by God to chastise you for evil yielded to.

IV. It is according to established order. Every generation of His children must learn that the evil He has hated He will always hate. What God has done God will do again when the same moral procedure is maintained by men. Our days of levity and hardness of heart and backslidings take us on to days of deadness and dishonour as indubitably as days of heat lead on to days of cold. We may see the consequences which shall follow our pride, our wrong companionships, our neglect of the ways of Christ, in the bitter griefs and pangs which befell Israel;

the scenery in which we suffer, and the agencies which act there may be utterly unlike those of ancient Judea or Chaldea, but the Holy One of Israel is our Holy One. In the old centuries the judgment of God was according to truth: it is so in modern centuries. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom."

V. It is proportionate. It is the action of the Just One, and takes steps in proportion to the nature and persistence of the offences against Him. Light neglected or misused prepares for the greater condemnation. Sodom is under an easier punishment than Chorazin, Judah than Israel. Ezekiel could not apportion the just time of tribulation—that is ever the prerogative of the Almighty King—but Ezekiel could be made to state and display His holy sentences. No doubt He allows excuses where they can be legitimately made; but that is only another form of saying that He weighs the doings of His people in scales in which no undue element is present. Then He gives forth His decision for hundreds of years or for tens—for half a lifetime or for a few weeks. Not a day beyond what is right and fair will any transgressor be afflicted. What trust and submission should not be given to the God of all spirits!

Scanty means of subsistence symbolising punishment (chap. iv. 9–17).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 9. The several sorts of vegetable food—the richest and the poorest in nutritive elements—being placed "**in one vessel**," signified that all classes of the population would be obliged to gather every particle they could, and then find it difficult to obtain sufficient provisions. The "**bread**" from such a mixture was to be made by Ezekiel in a quantity corresponding to "**the number of the days that thou shalt be on thy side, three hundred and ninety days.**" This is the period of Israel's punishment as referred to in ver. 5. It is a sign of the time during which the ten tribes should remain in captivity among the Gentiles, and of the low estate in which they would be there.

Ver. 10. Of the prescribed food Ezekiel was to "**eat by weight twenty shekels a day**," somewhere about ten ounces of English measure, and a very scanty portion for ordinary healthful nourishment; but, as in instances of shipwreck and sieges, meant to maintain life as long as possible—"too much for dying, too little for living." "**From time to time shalt thou eat it:**" not to make one poor meal, but to take a "ration" at stated intervals.

Ver. 11. So also "**thou shalt drink water by measure, the sixth part of a hin**"—about a pint, and sadly insufficient for a climate like that of Central Asia.

Ver. 12. The food was to be eaten, as common "**barley cakes**" still are in the East, after having been baked in hot ashes; but with a strange peculiarity, "**thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man**" (*cf.* Isa. xxxii. 12). The dung was not to be used as an ingredient of the cakes, as has been strangely supposed, but of the fuel. The use of human ordure in fuel was not practised, and the order to employ it was meant to indicate "**in their sight**"—for clear and deep impression—that which is stated in

Ver. 13. "**The Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles.**" The children of Israel would find themselves, during the period of their captivity, in such a condition that the laws of Moses in reference to foods could hardly be kept. They would have to eat their bread defiled—what their souls might loathe—and so would become almost as the heathen. They would not be able to boast of their special separateness.

Ver. 14. Ezekiel had submissively accepted the divine appointments hitherto—he makes a protest now. "**Then said I, Ah Lord God! behold, my soul hath not been polluted;**" and he goes on to specify certain kinds of forbidden food from which he had rigidly abstained. The rigidness was all the more appro-

priate in that Ezekiel was dwelling in a heathen country. By means of adhering to all ritual observances a fence was planted round Israel against the encroachment of conquering heathendom, and the prophet was a rallying-point for strength to the exiled people when they strove to live not as did the heathens. The observance of legal institutions that could be observed outside of the Holy Land was consistently maintained by Ezekiel, and he argues from the particular commands in reference to foods to the general obligation which he acknowledged in reference to everything by which he would have been consciously defiled. It is the appeal of a servant who has gone far beyond obedience to the mere letter—who is sensitively alive to being clean in heart as well as in act—who would shun the appearance of evil. For he could not plead any commandment prohibiting the use of the prescribed fuel; he could make a plea only from his own disgust, which was not simply that of his senses, but also of his moral feelings. It is no sign of priestism in Ezekiel. Peter the apostle, who was not a priest, showed something of the same spirit. But the case of Peter (Acts x. 14), who was not a captive, is not altogether parallel to this. The only point of similarity is that Peter had "not eaten anything common or unclean."

Ver. 15. The answer to Ezekiel's protest is a relaxation of the original order. "**Then he said unto me, Lo I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung.**" Nothing is more usual in those parts of the East than to observe cow's dung, mixed with grass, straw, &c., made up into fuel for cooking. It is not likely that Ezekiel, any more than his neighbours, would consider himself polluted by eating cakes baked with this inodorous material, and so he makes no objection to the command, "**Thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith.**"

Ver. 16. "**I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem.**" This alludes to the forty days during which Ezekiel was to lie on his right side, and signified that, in the period of Judah's sufferings corresponding thereto, a lack of sufficient nourishment to sustain activities with energy would be experienced. The bread would not be polluted, as the bread given in the wilderness was not polluted, by the place; but as the natural supply found there was not sufficient for the wants of a multitude, so the supplies for Judah would be marked by scantiness: still the punishment would not be so severe or so continuous as that of Israel. It was that of a *remnant*, and would be "cut short in righteousness." In the besieged city "**they shall eat bread by weight and with care,**" as those who are hard put to and anxious; "**they shall drink water by measure and with astonishment,**" as in perplexed wonder whether and when the sources would run dry.

Ver. 17. The Lord had reason for this procedure. His broken covenant necessitated that they should feel a deficiency of "**bread and water, and be astonied,**" be in perplexity and wonder, "**one with another,**" each and all, "**and consume away,**" become gaunt and offensive, "**for their iniquity.**" Hunger and thirst, sorrow and dismay, would fall upon the sinners in Zion, as the ancient book of the law had threatened (Lev. xxvi. 39).

HOMILETICS.

God's Action against Iniquities Affecting His Servants.

1. *Servants who know the Lord's will and do it not sink into destitution and perils similar to theirs who sit in darkness and have no light* This aggravation of the misery cannot but be experienced, viz., contrast with the blessings which they have forfeited by misuse. Israel had rejected its God, had chosen the way of the heathen, and having thus broken the conditions of its covenant with God, nothing remained but that it should be treated as the heathen. The son has left his father's house, wasted his substance, fallen into want, and is on the verge of perishing with hunger.

Not the worthiness of godly friends, not the calling ourselves Christians, not observance of the external rites of worship can hinder from entering into the state of those who live as without God in the world. A professedly Christian nation may be largely affected by commercial depression, sorrow, despondency, doubt, and dark fears for the future, if it is not true to God. The statement is sometimes made that Christian nations are no better than heathen nations, and the grounds for it, if we could see clearly, might be perceived in some indifference, neglect, antagonism to the holy, just, and good law of God. All evil things which transpire prove that He will not be mocked; least of all by those to whom He has manifested His righteousness and love. They must bear the fate of the heathen, whatever be their surprise and repugnance at what is undergone.

2. *Servants who do His will are subjected to trials in common with those by whom they are surrounded.* The bands which bind men into society are not forged so as to allow an escape, from evils which are rife in the community, for one of its constituent parts. They who fear the Lord fall into straitness, hunger, become weakly, if the circumstances in which they dwell are replete with the influences which produce such effects. Innocent children suffer from famine as well as men whose actions have contributed to the intensity of the famine; so does the man who humbly prays for relief as well as the man who curses the hardships he has to put up with. It is not in freedom from the troubles which stir in their environment that the sons of God are to find their comfort; it is in the conviction that they have not gone with a multitude to do evil, and that God writes their names in His book of remembrance. If they receive good in society from the hand of the Lord, shall they not receive evil also?

Every one who wants to be where the Supreme Will directs him to be, and to help the brothers who are within his power to reach, must be ready to encounter pinchings, disgusts, wearying hopes, anguish as well as sufficient grace. The Christ must needs "suffer many things" by coming amongst men, and His servants who would walk in His spirit may look for trials which, in a sense, they do not deserve. Let them see in Ezekiel one who, like themselves, had neither the mission nor the resources of Jesus Christ, and be instructed to take up and endure galling burdens for the welfare of the people in whose sufferings they are associated. Not in vain shall they suffer according to the will of God.

"Those periods of tribulation and chastisement, which the prophet here represents, have they not a voice for other times? . . . The lukewarm and fruitless professor—so long as he cleaves to the way of iniquity, and refuses to yield a hearty surrender to the will of God—is in bondage to the elements of the world, and therefore can have no part in that good land which floweth with milk and honey. The doom of Heaven's condemnation hangs suspended over his head; and if not averted by a timely submission to the righteousness of God, and a cordial entrance into the bond of the covenant, he shall infallibly perish in the wilderness of sin and death."—*Fairbairn.*

Sensitiveness to Spiritual Evil (Chap. iv. 1215).

Burden-bearing with others, and to any extent for them, may expose to unpleasant associations and proceedings. Past habits and confirmed tastes may receive shocks which are hard to withstand. Yet the duty has to be done for the Lord. In such difficulties against service we must not accept their darkest aspects. We must learn to apply our natural shrinking from what is unpleasant to the case before us, and proceed according to the light which may be given to us. Our sensitiveness to anything that we feel unbecoming should inform us—

1. *That we have to maintain past faithfulness to duty.* Ezekiel did not like the thought of turning out of the way in which he had hitherto walked and kept himself pure. It was no ignoble consistency he was desirous to preserve. Consistency

may be a fault when it weds us to what is unwise and not truly kind. It is a grand thing when it impresses the need of being able to hold ourselves in self-respect by being obedient to what we regard as right and sacred. What more honourable in a young man than that he will say, "I have not been discredited by low and offensive habits, and I shrink from them with loathing"? Or for a man, who is known to profess allegiance to Christ the King, to say, "I have not been contracting the taints of the spirit of the world; I have not been a cause of reproach to the Blessed Name by my cold disregard of the interests of the kingdom of Christ, and I shudder at the idea of doing anything which will seem contrary to my past conduct"? Yet there may be something more. There may be such a susceptibility to the appearance of evil that men will deprecate being taken into a course on which they may have to touch that which is not morally wrong, but which offends their taste for what is spiritually pure. It is bad to have one string out of tune. In seeking our own improvement, a book whose suggestions are not altogether true and holy could be read; in seeking the best way of helping others we might see unclean courts and houses, and contact with smutty persons might appear in view. What man or woman, sensitive to the continuance of their pureness of thought and conduct, would not rise up with the cry, "O my soul! come not thou into their secrets; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united"? Bypast separateness from evil becomes a ground from which to act against approaching, apparently defiling influences. The man who has lived "unspotted from the world" will not readily reconcile himself to step into a place where his garments may become soiled. His faithfulness heretofore to the requirements of the holy law will impel him to repudiate what might seem to defile him now.

How blessed would this earth be if the hearts of all people deprecated everything which would lower the standard of moral taste or shake confidence in the prosecution of the high prize of a stainless life!

2. *That we should regard our inward feelings as well as the external act in respect to what is required of us. The inward is not to be sullied.* The Master's decision has for ever placed the state of men's hearts in a more important position than that of their words and deeds. That which comes out of the heart is that which defiles, and every one who would be as his Master must endeavour to keep the heart so clean as that no pollution shall mingle in its movements. It is a true stimulus to struggling believers to hear, from the lips of one of ancient days, such an appeal as this of the burdened prophet. How it may urge us to guard our acquired sensitiveness to defiling acts, to keep that which we have already attained, and long to be prevented from all filthiness of the spirit, so as to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord!

The outward is not to be accepted without appeal. The hard and irksome processes appointed for Ezekiel might be entered into by him, but he wanted part of them to be less unpleasant and trying to his tender conscience. So he sought for an alteration in the requirement. Thus it seems that what is the present will of God may not be followed by immediate acquiescence. An attack of disease does not compel the patient to say, "I must submit, without an effort to get rid of it." The disobedient act of a child, which must be punished, does not demand the parent to inflict that kind of punishment against which the child revolts. The contents of that cup, in which the venom of the world's sins was concentrated, could not be drank, by Him who came on purpose to drink it, without a cry of aversion towards the awful task of love. And we are bound to make every attempt at extrication from external proceedings with which we have to do, if we are likely to suffer any moral defilement by them. "It were better for me to die than that any man should make my glorying void." But no outer event can hurt our souls unless our souls turn it to evil.

3. *That alleviation to our souls will be granted by God.* No command of God to His servants can have an element in it which will really deprave their souls. Still that fact does not dim His fatherly pity so that He cannot see their shrink-

ings. Let a change not disparage His justice, holiness, truth, and He is willing to alter the conditions of His instructions, and make them less dreadful to the moral fastidiousness of His own. He has a respect even for their exaggerated feelings, and in His wisdom and love mitigates that which pains them. He pities them "like a father." He does not desire to impose one unnecessary pang upon them. They may ask Him for whatsoever alleviation might ease their trouble and revulsions, in the hope that He will relax the stringency of His demands, if He does not renounce them. We have to do with God, who has tender compassion for every one who wants to be pure in heart. He does not quench the smoking flax.

"Let it teach us not to be rigid and stick to our wills, and think it disparagement to abate of our wills and right, and yield to others, when God, who is infinitely above us, can yield to us, and doth so daily, bearing our infirmities."—*Greenhill.*

The last methods of punishment symbolised and interpreted (chap. v. 1–17).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The requirements made of Ezekiel still proceed in his house. Already he has been a sign that Jerusalem would undergo a thorough siege; that specified periods of stringent suffering should be allotted to both portions of the house of Israel; that hunger, anxiety, and defilement would be encountered; and furthermore, he is to be a sign of the various forms of penalty which should be incurred as the closing manifestations of the Lord's dealing justly with iniquities. In this case, as in the preceding three, we appear necessitated, by the very conditions of the requirement, to suppose that Ezekiel could not be expected to carry on literally the processes assigned to him. How could he, in the disabled state to which he must have been reduced if he had externally obeyed the previous requirements, shave his head and beard with a sword, or burn the appointed part of hair in Jerusalem itself? Even if it were certain that he could do so, it would be unbecoming to believe that the Lord Himself literally drew a sword after the third part of hair which was scattered to the wind. Notwithstanding these difficulties, we are sure that the actuality of the things signified was somehow conveyed to the minds of his captive countrymen—the method of doing so being unknown.

Ver. 1. "And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife"—rather *sword*, as in the end of ver. 2. He was not, besides the sword, to "take a barber's razor," but he was to use the sword as a barber's razor. A closer rendering of the Hebrew warrants this explanation. "*A razor of barbers thou shalt take it*"—*i.e.*, the sword, as the gender intimates—"*to thee;*" "and cause it to pass upon thine head and thy beard." In the hands of an earlier prophet the use of a razor had already been made significant of punishment by the Lord. "In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired . . . the head and the hair of the feet; and it shall also consume the beard" (Isa. vii. 20). Moreover, in accordance with biblical representations, shaving off the hair of the head and beard was one of the signs of mourning and reproach, and, besides, it was forbidden to priests (Lev. xxi. 5). God, enjoining a priest to reverse his own ritual observance, would give additional emphasis to the keenness of the calamity shadowed forth: "then take thee balances to weigh and divide" (lit.) "them," *i.e.*, the hair. An apportionment of distinct sufferings is to be carefully measured out, so that all may feel "the judiciary providence of God." We modify the words of an old Latin commentator, and say, "The sword or razor signifies divine vengeance, the head the city, the balances its equity, and the hair the people to whom punishments shall be distributed." Or, as Theodoret says, "The sword indicates avenging power, the shaving of the beard the removal of grace and glory, the scales and weights the determination of divine justice."

Ver. 2. Ezekiel is commanded to

arrange the hair in proportionate parts, and to dispose of each. "**Thou shalt burn with fire**"—in a flame—"**a third part in the midst of the city**"—in the midst of the model of the besieged city which lay before him—"**when the days of the siege are fulfilled**"—when the days for his symbolical completion of the siege had come to an end; "**and thou shalt take a third part and smite about it**"—*i.e.*, the city—"**with a knife**," or sword, as ver. 1; "**and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind.**" The rest of the people have perished; this third alone survives. It must, therefore, include within itself both the poor, who might be left unsettled in Judea, as well as the numbers who had been dispersed among other countries. And there seems no valid objection against considering that it included the people of a more distant future than that which would be passed through by the living generation. The lot of the nation, as a nation, is involved in the action of the Lord. The next words show the symbol passing into a reality, while an intimation of sufferings in the land of exile is made: "**and I will draw out a sword after them.**" They shall not escape because of change of locality. By this procedure of Ezekiel three kinds of punishment are set forth. One part of the people dies in flames—ver. 12 interprets this of famine and disease; a second part dies in flight, sallies, battles; the surviving part becomes "tribe of the wandering foot and weary breast." But the people will not be absorbed or obliterated.

Ver. 3. "**Thou shalt also take thereof**"—from that scattered portion—"**a few in number, and bind them**"—this "very small remnant" of hairs—"**in thy skirts**," ends of his garment. God has to fulfil His covenant of mercy; seed must be preserved as the instruments of His purposes; and Ezekiel is required to signify, by caring for the safety of a few, the eternal purpose of God. But even of this few not all would be delivered.

Ver. 4. "**Then take of them again, and cast them into the midst of the fire**"—a different word from that of ver. 2, and signifying a somewhat diverse mode of suffering about to befall the reduced number of people. They were not all right in heart, the best were tainted and needed a purgation, a proof of how deplorable was the spiritual condition of the surviving people. This infliction would not be confined to the unfaithful among the gathered ones: "thereof"—from this consuming fire—"**shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel:**" the doom of the few involves the doom of the whole people as such. "Judgment must begin at the house of God, and what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" A striking parallel to this declaration to Ezekiel is found in Isaiah. "And if there should yet be a tenth in it, this shall again be consumed; (yet), as the terebinth and the oak, though cut down, have their stock remaining, (even so) a sacred seed (shall be) the stock thereof" (vi. 13).—*Cheyne.*

A divine interpretation of his symbolical action is given to Ezekiel. He hears words describing the guilt of and the judgments which shall fall upon Jerusalem and his people; and, first of all, there is conveyed a meaning which is to be attached to Jerusalem.

Ver. 5. "**Thus saith the Lord God; This Jerusalem**"—it is unnecessary to supply *is*—"**I have set it**" *her*, "**in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her.**" It has been common for nations, whose means of locomotion are neither convenient nor rapid, to consider their country the central point around which other countries are clustered. Such a notion might have been accepted by the Jews in reference to Judea; but it is not with such a reference that the situation of Jerusalem is specified here. In explaining this reference it is not requisite to point out how the Holy Land stands in relation to Egypt and Syria, to Assyria and the Isles of the Gentiles. We decline the merely local limitations as not expressive of the fact intimated, while we still perceive, in the then active influences of the world, certain advantages adhering to the site which Jerusalem occupied. The true interpretation is elsewhere

It is thus stated by Keil: "Jerusalem is described as forming the central point of the earth, neither in an external, geographical, nor in a purely typical sense, as the city that is blessed more than any other, but in a historical sense, in so far as 'God's people and city actually stand in the central point of the God-directed world-development and its movements;' or, in relation to the history of salvation, as the city in which God hath set up His throne of grace, from which shall go forth the law and the statutes for all nations, in order that the salvation of the whole world may be accomplished."

Ver. 6. "**And she hath changed**"—the ordinary usage of the word *changed* refers to murmuring, opposing, rebelling against, or some such action, and often with a statement of the object, as here, against which the act operates—*she rebelled against* "**my judgments**"—though they were known, yet were they so disregarded as to incur the crime of turning them "**into wickedness more than the nations**"—to a degree of evil which even the heathen could not be charged with, "**and**" she rebelled against "**my statutes more than the countries that are round about her; for they**"—of this Jerusalem—"**have refused my judgments**"—with a kind of disdain—"**and my statutes they have not walked in them.**" The penalty of such a course follows.

Ver. 7. "**Therefore thus saith the Lord God;**" but before announcing the doom an emphatic presentation of their unhallowed conduct is made: "**Because ye multiplied**"—a somewhat infelicitous rendering of a difficult term, for which a translation like "**ye raged**" is better, *i.e.*, made a turmoil in acting as rebels—"**more than the nations that are round about you,**" and "**have not walked in my statutes, neither have kept my judgments, neither have done according to the judgments**"—laws and ways of living and worshipping—"**of the nations that**" are "**round about you.**" Further on (chap. xi. 12) Ezekiel accuses the people thus, "Ye have done after the manners (*lit.* judgments) of the heathen that are round about you." There is no real contradiction between the two representations. The heathen pursued courses which were opposed to God's will, and Israel did the same; but the former showed also that the word of the law was written in their heart, and, so far as they had obeyed that transcript, they had done that which Israel had not done. Israel had resisted both revealed and natural obligations.

Ver. 8. "**Therefore thus saith the Lord God**"—the suspended threatening is now pronounced—"**Behold I, even I, am against thee**"—a solemn asseveration that the covenanted relationship to the Lord, however boasted of, would not shield from the punishment due to Israel for their violation of the covenant. He would prove that He was not a dead God—a mere name of power and holiness—"**and will execute judgments in the midst of them**"—the means of punishment shall be forthcoming and effective "**in the sight of the**" heathen "**nations.**" Thus one aspect of retributive justice is unfolded—it will be public: the heathen shall know that He is Lord by the judgment which He executeth. Another is presented—it is exceptional.

Ver. 9. "**And I will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like**"—there would be peculiarities in the woes which should befall Israel that would be marked as unique throughout all time. If acts as shocking as those referred to in next verse are observed in the distressed periods of other nations, we must remember that when a wife or child is expelled from the home, the calamity, though similar, is far worse than when a guest or servant is expelled. Such was the relation of Israel to God that their punishment had elements of horror in it which the same suffering happening to another people had not. The primary reference of the threatening is clearly to the then existing Israel, but seems to be applied by the Lord Jesus to that generation of the Jews who were subjected to terrible calamities when Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed by the Romans. "Then the tribulation shall be such as was not since the beginning of the world, nor ever shall be" (Matt. xxiv. 21)—

"**because of all thine abominations**"—a frequently used word, expressing actions and habits which, however common and palliated, were such as the Lord could not endure to hear and see in His professed people—each sin had done harm and each would be reckoned in.

Ver. 10. The punishment will be characterised by such intensity of suffering that family ties will be ruthlessly disrupted. "**The fathers shall eat the sons,**" as had been predicted should come to pass if they would not hearken to the Lord, but walked contrary to Him (Lev. xxvi. 29), "**and the sons shall eat their fathers,**" and all who survive "**will I scatter into all the winds.**"

Ver. 11. From this verse to the end of the chapter the punishment is more fully announced as from the Lord. The emphatic "**therefore**" (Heb.), which is prefixed to several of the declarations of this chapter, is here followed by the solemn oath, "**As I live, saith the Lord God.**" I, the Living One, shall die if these judgments are not executed. This oath is sustained by His self-existence—that which is the basis of all truth and reality, and a guarantee that there will be no revocation, no reversion: "He can swear by no greater." "**Surely because thou hast defiled my sanctuary.**" They had entered into the place where His honour tabernacled, and taken a course there which proved how completely they had cast off His supremacy. They had not been restrained by any reverence or attachment. They had occupied it "**with all thy detestable things and with all thine abominations**"—wickedness of all kinds had been practised, and the way in which it was carried on is shown in chap. viii. We shall mistake this accusation if we confine its reference solely to the employment of the Temple for idolatrous proceedings. The Temple was the ideal heart of the theocracy. All spiritual energy proceeded from it; all objects of that energy reacted on it. So that if the people indulged in evil elsewhere, and came impenitent into the courts of the Lord's house, they defiled the sanctuary, and their ears were made to tingle with the indignant remonstrance of Isaiah, "Who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts?" or with that of Ezekiel afterwards, "Should I be inquired of at all by them?" The glory due unto the name of the Lord had been polluted, and He will take steps to clear it. "**I will also diminish,**" our English version supplies *thee*. In comparing Deut. iv. 2, where this same Hebrew word is employed, "Ye shall not add to this word which I command you and ye shall not diminish from it," the expression seems sufficient without adding *thee*. As the Israelites had taken away from the rights of God to His sanctuary, so He will diminish the benefits He had hitherto bestowed on them.

Ver. 12. An explanation is now given of the symbolical actions prescribed in ver. 2. From this it is made clear that the *fire* there is to represent disease and starvation as among the destructive agencies affecting the sinful people.

Ver. 13. The menaced penalties being carried out, "**mine anger shall be accomplished;**" its full force will be brought to act so as to inflict every item of the penalties due to such transgressors. "**And I will cause my fury to rest upon them;**" it will find its goal in those who suffer from it, and there come to an end: it will have finished "His strange work." "**And I will be comforted.**" We might translate, in accordance with another signification of the Hebrew, *I repent myself*. It is preferable to retain the translation of our version, as better expressing the idea that the old has ended and that the ground for a new procedure will be laid. (*Vide* Isa. x. 24–27, in reference to Assyria.) This betokens one mode of the divine life. It is a highly figurative, and, of course, imperfect token; but, so far as we can explain, it shows that the Lord receives satisfaction in vengeance accomplished, since the violators of His honour are fairly punished and His rights are fully vindicated. A God who could not assert and maintain, at any cost, His own just and perfect authority, would be only an idol-god. Nor is it Himself alone whom the finished punishment concerns. "They," the next verse is proof that it is

other *nations* who "shall know that I the Lord have spoken in my zeal," and not the prophet in over-eagerness or factiousness. The words are again repeated in vers. 15 and 17, and show that Ezekiel was speaking by direction of the living God of Israel, who would not allow His righteous laws to be trampled under men's feet. History has become a guarantee for the divine origin of the threatenings.

Ver. 14 is a further statement of the penalty which was to be executed on the devoted city. "Waste and a reproach," *a reproach* "among the nations that are round about," and *waste* "in the sight of all that pass by."

Ver. 15. "So it"—Jerusalem—"shall be a reproach," &c. Inferences of several kinds will be drawn from the sad and ruined state of the punished people, and lessons of moral worth become distincter.

Ver. 16. According to the ground-text, Deut. xxxii. 23, "the evil arrows" here are those "of famine," which shall be bitter and destructive and accumulative in its horrors: "I will increase the famine;" hunger upon hunger will come "upon you."

Ver. 17. Another element of terror is mentioned for the first time, "evil beasts." We may suppose that they are to be taken literally; but it is difficult to see how they could be a noticeable ingredient in the cup of misery which was to be drank by a beleaguered city, and Hengstenberg is probably right in referring the phrase to the heathen, on the ground that the designation of brutalised men, who have no breath from God, as beasts is deeply rooted in the Scriptures. "And pestilence and blood"—some terrific diseases—"shall pass through thee." A solemn appeal to the certainty of the accomplishment comes in, as already, on the ground of the Lord being the speaker in reality. Repetition of the same expression is a characteristic of Ezekiel's style.

HOMILETICS.

Where Much is Given, Much is Required (vers. 5–17).

As each stage of a physical process manifests another condition of the materials which are under the action of forces, so each stage in national affairs expresses a changed aspect of the relations between the Creator and the creature, the great King and His subjects, the Holy and the unholy. If the punitive treatment of the Jews was painfully startling, the presentation of it, which the prophet is commissioned to make, is meant to unfold, to the existing and other generations, a fresh development of the thoughts and ways of God. These verses may be held to show that the sorest penalties will be a consequence of privileges set at naught. In them observe—

I. The advantages conferred.

1. *A favourable position:* "Set in the midst of the nations." It is obvious that certain countries, certain cities, are distinguished above others by climate, materials for traffic, openings to surrounding people. In some such beneficial conditions the ancient Jerusalem was situated; but above them, and of greater importance still, was the fact that there was His sanctuary—the place where His honour dwelt. Both temporal and spiritual benefits come from God, and each advantage should be regarded as enforcing a higher obligation.

2. *The personal interest of God.* It is He who condescends to speak to them, to punish them Himself. He did not treat them on the same lines as He did the other tribes of men. No nation had God so nigh it as this people. They were the children of Abraham, His friend. He bare them and carried them all the days of old. Whosoever touched them touched the apple of His eye. Their offences were offences against Him—not against some vague "accusation" of their own consciences. It is well to come to that position from which we see that God is with us in a wider sense than Israel surmised, that in Christ He reconciles the

world unto Himself, that we stand amid the light of that life which is given to "whosoever will."

3. *Opportunity for influencing others.* To fancy that this Jewish people was chosen simply to be the worshippers of the only true God is to suppose that which would not accord with other manifestations in His realm. His sun exhales vapour from water, the vapour is turned into showers, the showers fall upon the earth and make it bring forth and bud. So is it that every person is to contribute to the good of others, and so His chosen nation was to be instrumental in making known His way and saving health among the people sitting in darkness. His purposes to bless that we may be blessings are not changed. He works to form vessels fit for His use, and one of the most potent influences, with souls which have been made alive to God through Jesus Christ, should be this—the Lord my God supplies me with grace, and I should live so as to promote His holy and good claims over men. Alas! so many do not realise their position as stewards of God, and many, like the Jews, cause His name to be blasphemed instead of honoured. Yet much has been given.

II. The unhallowed disposition cherished by the advantaged. That they who have known the true God should "change His judgments into wickedness and should not walk in His statutes," evidences their disposition to be—

1. *Marked with contempt for God.* Their own judgments are preferred to His And even where there might be a formal agreement with His revealed will, it is, on their part, no submission to Him, but a carrying out of their own desires. They act as if God were of less consideration than themselves. They will not have Him to reign over them. They feel at liberty to make that which He intended for good into a means for doing wickedly. Prayers will be repeated, public worship will be patronised, and still the heart will continue to cherish its selfish, worldly pursuits, as if God could be mocked and overcome.

2. *More guilty than that of the heathen.* The Jews gloated over the ignorance and low hopes of the uncovenanted peoples, and yet the latter had been more faithful to their streaks of light than the Jews to their dayspring. There is no monopoly by the Jewish people of this inconsistency. Not a few among Christians take pleasure in telling of the cruelties, falsehoods, lusts which are observed among the tribes and people who are not Christian, and turn such sad aspects into a means of setting off how much purer and better a state is their own. The comparison is often very unfairly made. And even if it were not—if the sins of heathendom were gross and numerous beyond those of Christendom—the rules of Christ are too often toned down and laid aside, both in the practice of Churches and the conduct of individuals. Their guilt in tampering with duty is far more offensive than that of the heathen can be. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!"

III. The severe punishment which manifests the guiltiness of those who have received much. When favoured children go out of the ways of their Holy Father, they walk upon hard, thorny, desolate tracts, where they perish.

1. *In those troubles they are treated by the Lord Himself.* "Behold I, even I, am against thee." Secondary agents will be employed, but in poverty or losses, diseases or hostile actions by other people, are to be recognised weapons wielded by the Lord against whom we have sinned. He does not abdicate His authority to things which cause pain and ruin, so that they do their will. We receive evil from His hand as well as good. And emphatically so if we have been living in open sins against Him. It is always a difficult matter to say what the sins are which bring about special stripes from the Lord; but there need be no difficulty in acknowledging that He "will execute judgments in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes," and that those judgments need not be the same for the same sins. Dishonesties, untruths, intemperance, will produce misery sooner or later, but the misery which comes in consequence of such transgressions is very different in its actions upon the individual sinners and their families. God knows how to deal

out in perfect wisdom the sufferings appropriate to the several cases, and the keenest pang of their suffering ought to be this, "My King, my Father, has become mine enemy, and fights against me."

2. *The punishment is intense.* "I will do that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like. Neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity." There will not be a grain of excessiveness in the punishment: it will be balanced to a hair's weight by the amount of sin. The perfect Judge alone can so accurately poise the scales; but none who know the right will fail to see that, however unparalleled the severity may seem, it is altogether proportioned to the offences, and will exhibit the magnitude of the guilt incurred.

3. *The lesson is intended to be widely taught.* The Lord will not do "His strange work" in secret. Other souls must be made to hear and fear, and His judgments shall be shown to "the nations round about in the sight of all that pass by." They will be differently affected by the lesson. Some will utter reproaches, others will frame taunts, and others will be instructed; but in some sort of dim form those proceedings against sin will make their principle enter into the thoughts of men, and contribute to the shaping of that unwritten law, with its penalty for wrong-doing, which has become established among nations who have lived in different spheres of growth. Where do we not find the maxim, that the heavier the punishment, the greater the guilt?

IV. The continued maintenance of the justice of God's rule. "I the Lord have spoken it"—however unlike it may appear that He should punish so, however awful the sufferings inflicted may be. "The divine righteousness remains always equally energetic."—*Heng.* Ezekiel is a medium for conveying the denunciations, but below those denunciations it is to be believed that righteousness and truth stand. They will not be moved by the assaults of men, let men beat against them as they will. And the prophet is a pattern from whom all preachers and teachers may learn to let the thoughts of God so enter into them, that when they do tell, as tell they must if they will be faithful servants, of the "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth" which shall be endured by those who make light of the Son of God, they should do it, not with extravagance or with mitigation, but with the strictest adherence to the manifestation made of the terror of the Lord. The gospel enters into no terms with those who forsake the Lord; it insists on repentance or destruction. If He is "not willing that any should perish," He would sooner see them perishing than that they should continue persistently to defile His holy presence. In Churches and out of them the solemn asseveration holds sway, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?"

God's Comfort in Punishment Achieved.

"I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted" (ver. 13).

There are conventional ideas about God, just as there are about what is proper procedure in society. Conventionalisms cannot hold their ground in the latter when a strong, clear impulse from the realities of life breaks upon them; and, in the former, superficial conceptions regarding divine procedure will be tested and remodelled when men, who see visions of God, set forth their impressions of Him "who ruleth by His power for ever." Their utterances may sound as if bordering on what is harsh and untenable, or as if altogether too familiar; but they will lay open aspects of the Almighty which, from one cause or other, have been dimmed and disturbed. Thus it might happen that deep convictions of the pity of the Lord for suffering, and His patience with wrong-doers, would foster a mode of

speaking of His dealings with people whom He had favoured, as if He could be nothing but soft and soothing and pleading, as if in His nature there were no materials for an unflinching resolution to see right done, even though the punishment of the wrong-doers was unexampled. Then a holy man will exclaim, in the word of the Lord, "I will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh;" or, "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries." Lax notions are shaken off, and we learn to think that "our God is a consuming fire," who is comforted when His fury has found a resting-place. Making allowance for the somewhat figurative turn of these words, we can perceive in them—

I. **All punishments are measured.** He that maketh the stormy wind to fulfil His word, that says to the sea, "Hitherto thou shalt come and no further," He says to every consequence of sin, "Thou shalt not put a hair's weight of distress more than I appoint." Men may talk of the germs of disease which settle upon a vine as if they will increase so as to destroy it, unless checked by human appliances; politicians may speak of armies invading a country as if they would ravage it till it was made waste, unless human diplomacy intervene. It is not often considered that behind every disease and every army the Divine Will means to control each, and exactly fix what it shall do. We are under a Lawgiver whose prerogative can never be contravened, and who claims to define every event by His hidden or revealed decree. Every sufferer may believe that he bears just what and just as is suitable to perfect righteousness and wisdom.

II. **Right is vindicated.** When the evil ways of men have taken them into woe then the Judge of the earth is satisfied, for they have received the due reward of their deeds. This means more than is often understood by the expression, "Sin is its own punishment." If that were all the punishment, then every prosperous tyrant, every unconfessing murderer, every successful mercantile swindler, every unabashed liar would have endured all possible suffering. The sin, the very thing which stands out as the worst of evils to a holy mind, being regarded as an advantageous proceeding by the unholy, could hardly be punished in the actor, since he delights in it or is unimpressed by its vileness. Thus viewed there would be little in sin to fear; it could be made a subject for despisal; and the moral order would be abandoned. It is not, however. God's rule is not so feeble and uncertain in its operation as to let it be. "He sitteth on the throne judging right," and He executes punishments which prove that there are retributions attached to the committal of sin entirely independent of the thoughts of sinners about their conduct. These retributions will find out their appropriate objects, as a resting-place is found, and will remain till the just award has been measured off. It is an awful fact for those who have sinned and have not repented. To neglect its bearing, to refuse to face its reality may be common, but the sentence against evil will not be annulled. Let those who reject Christ Jesus realise the solemn contents of the words, "He that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth on him"—His fury rests upon them. Then, when bitter wrong has been righted, when vengeance has placed its marks upon the rebellious, when the hideous past has been swept over by an obliterating storm of justice, then the Holy One sees that right has proved its power to crush wrong and maintain its supremacy, and He is comforted.

III. **The ground is cleared for a new movement.** The Lord is not comforted merely because He sees the flaunting edifices of wrong utterly in ruins. Withered, scattered leaves form materials for the growth of a coming spring; the refuse of fallen buildings becomes a location in which plants and insects make a home, and the desolation of a country or the depression of a people gives an opening through which stirring influences may enter. Gibbon's statement in "The Decline and Fall"—that when "the fierce giants of the North broke in" upon an enervated people who were but "a race of pigmies," they "mended the puny brood"—asserts this principle. By Ezekiel's time the Israelites had become boasters, sensual, hypocrites; the covenant God made with their fathers had been shivered into fragments:

what good could accrue from the continuance of such a state of things? Abolish it or suspend it, and a way will be opened for operating in new methods of righteousness, wisdom, and grace. That opening is a comfort to the Lord. He will enter upon a course from which higher and better results will be attained. The old has vanished, the new will arrive. So the Lord Jesus refers to Jerusalem and says, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate"—that is the close of the bad past—and He goes on to add, "Ye shall not see Me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"—that is the pledge of better movements.

1. "*The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble.*" He "will execute judgment upon all, and convince all that are ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed."

2. "*The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.*" However long His will may be disobeyed, yet a King shall reign in righteousness. "Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy, for Thou renderest to every man according to his work." Judgment and mercy shall complete the purposes of Him who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy.

4. Further Instructions as to the Consequences of Israel's Conduct (Chap. vi.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—*The judgment on places of idolatry and the worshippers* (ver. 1–7). After asserting, in ver. 1, his renewed consciousness that he was to speak from the inworking power of the Lord, Ezekiel unfolds the procedure which will be taken. Here he has special reference to the whole country, as in chaps. iv. and v. the city Jerusalem was chiefly in view.

Ver. 2. "**Son of man, set thy face,**" a frequent command given to the prophet, and intended to impress him with a vivid sense of the objects he was to address; "**towards the mountains of Israel and prophesy against them.**" The Lord has a controversy with the mountains and their prominent physical features, as if they had ears and faculties for understanding. He, as it were, directs His admonitions through them to the men who had disordered those features by setting up forbidden idols and paying open dishonour to His holy name.

Ver. 3. "**And say . . . Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers**"—the last word is used of the beds or channels in which waters run, and should be translated here by *gorges* or *ravines;* it thus forms a more exact parallelism "**to the valleys.**" "They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good" (Hosea iv. 13). Cf. ver. 13 below. "**Behold I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places.**" The Hebrew word for high places is occasionally employed simply to signify elevated spots, but more commonly refers to them as the shrines for worship habitually carried on. The worship in such places was part of that nature-worship which has prevailed in many regions of the world, and in which Baal, the sun-god, had a prominent share (Num. xxii. 41, Josh. xiii. 17). From what quarter the Israelites were influenced towards Baal-worship is doubtful, but they had yielded to it, and crowned the high places, which lay exposed to the rays of the sun, with figures of some sort. How far that worship was alien to the mind of the living God is illustrated by what the reforming King Josiah did in his zeal for the Lord (2 Kings xxiii.), and in what Ezekiel adds.

Ver. 4. All the apparatus belonging to this idol-worship is doomed to destruction, "**your altars shall be desolate,**" not fit to be resorted to, "**and your images,**" in margin, *sun-images*, but probably figures of some kind representing Baal, the god of the sun, and Astarte, goddess of the moon, "**shall be broken,**

and," directing the address to the people, "I will cast down your slain before your idols." This is a reference to Lev. xxvi. 30, though this special word for idols is found chiefly in Ezekiel. It is probably connected with a root which signifies filth, and is a contemptuous description of them—they are dung, or *refuse-gods*.

Ver. 5. "And I will lay the dead carcases of the children of Israel before their refuse-gods"—the gods they cried to could not defend from death, and, their nothingness having been proved, they would be defiled by the corpses of their unhelped devotees; "and I will scatter your bones round about your altars"—the utmost ignominy would be cast upon idolatry by this utter desecration of its materials for worship.

Ver. 6. The declaration is made that, beside the destruction in the high places, &c., extreme desolation would be produced wherever population had gathered. The ground of this extension of punishment is indicated in Isaiah's words, "According to the number of thy cities so are thy gods," and the end aimed at is to sweep away every trace of idol-service, "that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate." The Hebrew word in the preceding portion of this verse and translated *desolate* is different from this one, which more appropriately should be translated *be guilty*. The altars are regarded as participating in, and so held guilty of the sin which they were used to carry out. A similar sentence was passed by the prophet sent to Jeroboam in the word of the Lord. When the king "stood by the altar to burn incense" the prophet cried, "O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord, Behold . . . upon thee shall Josiah offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." The refuse-idols should be done away with and the sun-pillars be hewn down and a complete abrogation ensue of all that had been unfaithfully done. "And your works"—"whatever can be ascribed to men which they have not taken from the mouth of God and the commands of His law"—"may be abolished."

Ver. 7. "And the slain"—a word in the singular, as if to show that one mind had animated the mass of the slain in practising idolatry—"shall fall in the midst of you." There will be survivors to see the slaughtered idolaters, and the eye will affect their heart so that they shall recognise the action of the almighty, righteous One, "and ye shall know that I am the Lord." Thus a ground is laid for the following promise.

HOMILETICS.

Creation's Materials Instructing Men (vi. 1–7).

It is common enough for men of all countries, when under the influence of strong emotions, to appeal to inanimate objects as if they were animated. It is a natural form of speech, proceeding from the formative hand. "He that formed the ear shall He not hear?" There is a likeness of the Creator in the creature; and when the impulse of feeling moves us to speak to sun or stars, to mountains or glens, as if they could comprehend our meaning, we are imitating Him who made all things and knows to what uses He can put them all. In His Word prophets and poets apostrophise created objects as witnesses of the Lord's doings. Thus Ezekiel does, and here we may consider—

I. There is a life in created objects. "Prophesy against the mountains." This susceptibility in creation was signified to Ezekiel in his "visions of God:" this is signified by Apostle Paul in the words, "All things have been created for Christ, and in Him all things consist"—have their continuance and order. Each has its post and its purpose in the administration of God; and because it helps to accomplish His far-reaching will, it may be truly regarded as having a portion in that life with which He fills all things. All things may not be called

living, but they are sustained by that life which is present everywhere. They suffer in man's bondage to corruption—"The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together." They are abashed and silent when ordered to be so by the Son of Man—"He rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm." Not as a freak of fancy, but as a suggestive and awful fact, we may look at the materials of nature and find tokens of the living God, observant of us and interested in us and our ways. In view of mountains and hills, girded by ravines and valleys, we may exclaim, "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me!"

II. There is a perversion of created objects. Men who look at and act upon nature colour it and swathe it with their own thoughts and aims. Advantages of position, capabilities for the application of human strength and skill to material things, are turned into means of doing that which pleases men and displeases the Lord. Mountains and valleys, heaps of stones and carved pillars, are thus associated with man in man's sins. They are placed under a sentence of condemnation, and marked with signs of disorder and destruction. What though they have no consciousness of good and evil, what though they have no power of action against the will of man, they are made into his instruments for evil, and must be broken when he is broken. For God does not abandon His claim over them. Every creature of His is good, only the dark shadow has fallen on them; their glory is tarnished; their tribute to the Maker's praise is obstructed; their pollution is as "a smoke in His nose," and He "will make them desolate." But man is the cause of all the evil. It is his procedure with the forms of things which depraves them; the mountain is occupied with the worship of the created sun, the shade of trees becomes the haunt for immoralities under the sanction of the gods. Thus are the creatures perverted. In olden times, altars were polluted, oblations were vain, incense was an abomination; in modern times, our buildings for public worship, with their decorations, our church music, with its display or its listlessness, may be perverted so as to be a condemnation of the worshippers. What need is there to serve the Lord in the beauty, not of any outward appearance, but of holiness!

III. There are tokens of doom on created objects.

1. *In their desolation.* "I will bring a sword upon you [mountains], and will destroy your high places." The ruins and the dreariness of spots, in which people were accustomed to serve their gods, suggest to inspecting eyes that the supremacy and sanctity of the Most High had been invaded there, and the invasion had been repelled with unsparing vehemence. Judgments were executed upon them, not because they could be held guilty, but because they had been the scenes of human wrong-doing. We are taught the needed lesson that sin is to be abhorred, not only because it defiles the sinner, but also because it draws the trail of the serpent over all he uses in his sin. "Every prospect" does not "please" where "man is vile."

2. *In the human sufferings they are made witnesses of.* "I will lay the dead carcases . . . before their idols." The very places to which they would flee for shelter will be turned into shambles; the reed they leaned on shall pierce their hand. So deserted would the districts become that the bodies would lie unburied, be made into ghastly skeletons, be bleached and crumble into pieces; their "bones would be scattered round about their altars." The fields of battle, the shores of surging seas, the ruins of earthquakes, with more or less distinct utterance, declare in Reason's ear, We are witnesses of the pains and death inflicted on a world over whose physical features the dishonour done to God has been imprinted, and we tell back to hearing ears that that God is holy in all His ways, cannot look upon sin, and will make good His title to supreme power and righteousness."

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 8–10. *A gleam of comfort.* Ezekiel has told how bitter ruin and slaughter should teach the children of Israel that "God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth," and now he will tell that that same truth would be learned in another way. Some of those who have survived and been taken into captivity shall be moved, by the hard conditions of their lives, to acknowledge that they have done very wickedly, and that God has done righteously.

Ver. 8. "**Yet will I leave a remnant that ye may,**" or, *in that ye shall,* "**have some,**" because they have been preserved so as to "**escape the sword among the nations,**" and who will be found amongst their fellow-countrymen "**scattered through the countries.**"

Ver. 9. In the privations and sorrows of exile, like the prodigal son in feeding on husks, they would come to themselves, and recall what they had been and done. "**They that escape of you shall remember me.**" The thought of God Himself would be brought distinctly into their hearts, and that would alter their convictions as to their bygone life. They would perceive that against Him, Him only, they had sinned; "**because I am broken with their whorish heart.**" The "Speaker's Commentary," in agreement with others, proposes to translate thus: *Because I have broken their whorish heart, which hath departed from Me, and their eyes,* &c. Hengstenberg, with others also, says, "The word properly means, 'I was broken:' this stands for, 'I have broken for myself;'" a translation which is equivalent to the former. Both signify that it was not what their whorish heart did to Him, but what He did to it, that is set forth. We cannot acquiesce in this opinion. The remnant, who remembered the Lord, perceived also that by various methods He had shown how grieved and provoked and wounded He was by the people turning away from His worship—that He was broken by their unfaithfulness. The expression is peculiar—is it more so than others in reference to the Lord? "I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock," &c. (Prov. i. 26). "Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" (Jer. xv. 18). "Behold I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves" (Amos ii. 13). This pain to God was occasioned, not by the inward only, but also by the outward proceedings of Israel, "**with their eyes, which go a whoring after their refuse-idols: and,**" in consequence of this remembrance of "the Lord and the words of His holiness," "**they shall loathe themselves,**" will look into the face of their past conduct with deepest aversion, "**because of all the evils,**" &c.

Ver. 10 should be read, "**And they shall know that I the Lord have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them.**" The words do not assert that the remnant should know He was the living God, but that He was true to all His warnings about the evil things which had come to pass among "a disobedient and gainsaying people." "By the correspondence of utterance and event, they know that He who spoke by the son of man is Jehovah—is God in the fullest sense."

HOMILETICS.

Conditions of Spiritual Knowledge (vers. 8–10).

Among those indicated by the verses are—

I. **A specialising action of the Lord.** "I will leave a remnant." Out of the idolatrous people; out of their broken-down trust in their land, their Temple, their covenant with God; out of their ranks as they were living amidst heathenism, what hope could there be that one even would receive a new life in his spirit? For men it might be impossible, but not for God. *It is His spontaneous action.* They would not have sought Him. They would have continued in sin and sorrow unless a power external to themselves had moved upon them. "Except the Lord of

hosts had left us a very small remnant," &c. "We love Him because He first loved us." *It is an action superior to circumstances.* Sins may be still prevailing, judgments in course of execution, the moral atmosphere of the places in which the sinners live apparently repulsive to spiritual health, yet the Lord is able to work there upon whom He will. He can make His mercy as well as His fury rest where all circumstances seem unfavourable. He can deliver a soul in Babylon as well as in Zion. *It is a mysterious action.* We may try to conjure up suppositions about reasons why God does not at once do all the evil which He threatens, or why He bestows on some that which He does not bestow on others; but a duly reverent heart will rather repeat the words of Jesus, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." For not in ourselves can we discover fitness. The acknowledgment of every sin-conscious soul must be, "I shall perish if He does not save me." *It is a comforting action.* It tells that greater is He that is for us than all that can be against us; that He is able to redeem souls from death; that however low His cause may have fallen, as if it were even destroyed, its preservation is with Him. He will not let it disappear. He will revive it in many or in few.

II. The pressure of tribulations. They did not serve the Lord when they were in their native land, when the Temple and its ordinances were accessible, when early and late prophets were addressing them in the Word of the Lord; but they do so when they are scattered among the nations, when they have seen death mowing down numbers of their friends, when they are in heaviness because of the loss of so much which they had formerly possessed. The gods they had trusted in had utterly failed to protect them, and they were made to feel that their own folly and wickedness had brought all the evil to pass, and they judged themselves, their lusts, their corruptions, their unfaithfulness to the Lord. "When He slew them, then they sought Him." Tribulations we may have, but Christ can give His peace. We may not have relief from them, and yet be taught of God. Cast into beds of affliction, surrounded by those who regard not the Lord, deprived of the means of grace, we may find spiritual blessings which a state of worldly comfort had not brought to us. "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction," and reconciliation to God makes up for all trouble in earthly things.

III. A consciousness of God. "*They shall remember me.*" They will recall His doings, and see how utterly He is different from the creatures they had worshipped; how they had been fed by His bounty; how they had heard His words; how patiently He had borne with their offences; how just He is in punishing; how good in preserving them from famine, pestilence, and the sword; how full of gracious love in acting upon their long-shut hearts. They set the Lord Himself before their faces. We may desire to be at peace with an armed man who is stronger than we, and yet not care to live with him; but let penitence kindle at the remembrance of the strong Lord, and we do not want to think about His pardon only, we want to live and walk in His presence. "*Because I am broken with their whorish hearts,*" &c. They learn truly of God, not because they were under the stripes of His wrath, and said as Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear," but because they had produced disappointment and pain to Him. In His light they see light. The thought that His heart was broken breaks theirs. They are humbled before His wonderful pity. His goodness leads them to repentance.

IV. A deep sense of personal unworthiness. "They shall loathe themselves for the evils," &c. We find in this—

1. *That their hearts were affected.* The effect of a consciousness of God was, as it was with Job, to make them abhor themselves and repent in dust and ashes. No more palliation of their idolatry, no attempting to lessen the blamableness of their conduct, could be entertained. From the depths of their souls they heaved sighs and groans of shame. It was sorrow according to God, and it wrought revenge, &c.

2. *That they unaerstood the controversy of God against them.* They did not

loathe themselves because of their banishment, their poverty, their bereavements, the contempt of the heathen, but because they had done evil. They had left Him, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out broken cisterns that could hold no water; they had treated their Lord unkindly, and wounded Him by offending against His majesty and grace. They saw that He had brought them into grievous sufferings, but it was when they saw that they had in sin disobeyed their God that they took right views of themselves and justified Him. Ah! we shall not escape condemnation because we have never worshipped an idol, never perpetrated any open transgression. Worldliness of temper, unkindness to a brother, formality in the worship of God, are bitter and abominable things before the Heart-searcher, and which He rebukes sternly. For such evils He will not need to condemn us; we shall condemn ourselves.

3. *That they made not one reserve.* "The evils committed in all their abominations." They would not defend any course they had taken. Sins in any place or with any person, sins in business or religion, sins in secret or in the railway, sins meant to be done or not looked on as sins, will form part of our confession of the unworthy conduct for which we loathe ourselves.

Look on your ways, look into your hearts, let the light of Christ shine on them, and shall ye not be ashamed and confounded for all ye have done? No door of hope for men can be opened other than that which brings us to God. With Him we should be blessed with spiritual blessings, and we should act as heralds to make known His coming to save and reign. "When I am weak, then am I strong."

The Power of the Word of God (ver. 10).

I. Before men are afflicted and humbled for their sin, they refuse and slight the Word of God. Let prophets preach powerfully, and lay God's judgments before the evildoers; they do not pay heed, but they shall know that their hearts were stout against God and His truth.

II. A heart under affliction, loathing itself for its sins, will give due honour to the Word of God. "Then shall they know." Blows beget brains, and ingratitude and abuse of the threatenings and promises which the Lord had made known will be acknowledged. The truest penitent doth most abhor himself, and the more of that self-abhorrence, the more complacency in the faithfulness of God in His word and His infinite love in Christ.

III. The Lord will not let His Word be unaccomplished. "I have not said in vain that I would do this. A word is in vain when it is not fulfilled, inefficaciously fulfilled, or unseasonably fulfilled; but none of these befall the Word of the Lord. It shall accomplish that which He pleases, and prosper in the thing whereto He sent it."—*Greenhill (abridged).*

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 11–14. *The doom assured.* The break in the dark threatening clouds is but for a moment. The time is not yet for the prophet to unfold the bright sunshine of rich mercy. He has pointed to a blessing among penitent exiles, but calamities are nearer than that is, and once more he recurs to the sombre and painful scene which must be the precursor of blessings. It is, with a few additional touches of colour, a repetition of former words.

Ver. 11. "**Smite with thine hand and stamp with thy foot.**" These gestures do not signify derision of the unhelping refuse-idols or their worshippers; or pain at the sufferings or revulsion at the iniquities of the people. A sharp, almost unconscious, clapping of the hand and stamping with the foot is occasionally seen when a thing has turned out badly, and all hope of accomplishing anything by it is at an end. This is the idea which has been wrapped up in similar gestures, on the part of

God or man, which are recorded in the Scriptures (chaps. xxi. 14, 17, xxii. 13, xxv. 6; Num. xxiv. 10; Job xxvii. 23). The gestures are consequent on the belief that the last scene of the observed proceedings is played out. To his gestures the prophet adds the exclamation, "**Ah!**" and affirms its reference "**to all the evil abominations of the house of Israel; for,**" because of the evils, "**they shall fall by the sword,**" &c. The three great means of punishment formerly threatened to the city (chap. iv. 2, 12) shall be applied to the country also.

Ver. 12. "**He that is far off,**" out of the range of the invading Chaldeans, "**shall die of the pestilence, and he that remaineth, and he that is besieged,**" or rather *he that is preserved*—as in Isa. xlix. 6, "To restore the *preserved* of Israel"—from pestilence and sword, "**shall die by the famine,**" &c.

Ver. 13 (comp. vers. 3, 5, 7). A fuller characterisation of the localities in which the people had reared idol-shrines is here given, and shows that "the land was full of idols," and that there should be an utter desecration of each "**place where they did offer sweet savour to all their refuse-idols.**" They were as eager to gratify, if they could, the inanimate idols as true worshippers were to offer what would be acceptable to the holy God; as Noah when he presented burnt-offerings for the first time on the renovated land (Gen. viii. 21).

Ver. 14. "**And I will stretch out my hand against them;**" they had placed idols all over the country, and He, too, would exert His power so as to "**make the land desolate utterly, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblath;**" an obscure reference, but probably applicable to the Moabitish double city of Diblathaim (Num. xxxiii. 46), which lay westward from the Arabian desert. A name, closely allied to this, is found on the lately discovered Moabitish stone as the name of some place. The thought is expressed that this desolation would be "**in all their habitations.**" No dwelling-house would exist where the sense of wasteness and loneliness should not be felt. This verse is ended, as ver. 13 had been begun, with a declaration that by such inflictions there would be impressed on the people a knowledge of the Eternal, Holy One.

HOMILETICS.

Some Conclusions as to Sin (vers. 11–14).

I. That its results will be a manifest wonder and pain to servants of the Lord. They will not merely "muse" upon the evils which are presented to them; they will at times give way to external expression of feeling. They will clap with their hands, &c.; rivers of water will run down their eyes; they could wish themselves accursed from Christ. Nowhere should there be such intense interest in watching the development of individual and national procedure as among those who believe in God who is light and love.

II. That all sins are considered in the judgments of the Lord. "All the evil abominations." And with reason. An inner or outward evil is a violation of law, and exerts a certain influence in contrariety to the will of God. Each is taken into His estimate of what He must do when He visits for transgressions.

III. That various forms of penalty against sin shall be inflicted. Through disease, violence, hunger, or some other method, every sinner shall become an object on which holy wrath will fall in greater or less heaviness. What if we do not understand the meaning of the manifold variety of griefs, pains, hardships, which beset men on their way to death, is our ignorance a measure by which to judge of the knowledge and justice of the Lord, or not rather a ground for making us dumb, not opening our mouth, because He has done it? Multiform sufferings betoken multiform sins.

IV. That the punishment has a correspondence to the sin. It was declared

to the Israelites, Acknowledge the supremacy of idols, and your carcases will defile the places in which you have worshipped. It is declared to those who may never have kissed their hands to any images, Indulge your appetites in an illegitimate way, and your bodies will be infected by the virus of the lust which is specially gratified; be insincere or dishonest or proud, and your souls will be cowed and stagger before the flashes of truth; be a professing worshipper of God whose heart has not taken the way to the Father by Christ, and to you the perfect peace which He gives shall be altogether a stranger True, it is rarely possible for men to say why one person should be laid under a different kind of affliction from that which another bears; but could we see the invisible links which bind the sin and its own penalty, should we not learn the true source of many sufferings which are now wholly inexplicable? The Lord's judgments are a great deep, but in that deep uniform forces are ever at work.

V. That God alone deals with sin. Germs of disease, invading bands of men, unpropitious seasons, irreverence and neglect of the means of grace apparently occasion pains, bereavements, struggles for life, a God who does no mighty work; but the apparent factors are His methods of acting. Behind the laws of nature and the forces which operate through social man, and which are operating in punishing wrong-doing, a spiritual mind will perceive the Lord's hand. Judgment and mercy come from Him. Understanding this, Jesus Christ, "bearing our sins in His own body on the tree," will be accepted and adored as the Son of God who came to destroy the works of the devil.

The Judiciary Administration of God (vers. 1–14).

God connected Himself with Israel in a manner He never had done with any nation before, nor would with any other again. In their case the actual experience of suffering on account of sin must have a certain singularity in it, so that it is possible to trace the execution of His judgments upon them. Still there is no caprice in His dealings; whensoever Israel's guilt is incurred, there will infallibly be a renewal of Israel's doom. The gospel has brought no suspension of God's justice, and only after it had been sent and put from them did the wrath fall upon the Jews to the uttermost, as it will upon similar transgressors. The reasonableness of the severity exercised may be perceived by glancing at the guilt and the punishment.

1. *The peculiar calling of Israel.* They were placed in a region that afforded obvious and varied facilities for exerting a beneficial and commanding influence on the *mind* of ancient heathendom. They were to take advantage of this position so as to make known the character and extend the worship of Jehovah. Thus Moses declared, "All the people of the earth should see that the Lord had established them to be a holy people to Himself and called them by His name." They were settled on a high vantage-ground for acting the part of the world's benefactors. This calling of Israel in respect to the nations now rests upon the Christian Church; only owing to dispensational changes the impulse is communicated individually, not nationally. Besides, the Jewish religion was predominantly of a symbolical character, and outward prosperity had to play an essential part in its propagation. *Now* the great element of power lies in the truth itself and in its influence exhibited by the lives of God's people. With differences as to method of working, the obligation remains substantially the same. The possession of the world is Christ's by right, and He commits it to His people to make good the title. Happy if they do so; but if not, heavy must be their condemnation.

2. *The condemnation of Israel.* They did not extend the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, but adopted the corrupt worships of surrounding nations, and did worse than they. In the face of all remonstrances and warnings they fell in with Gentile superstitions. They did so because of their prevailing carnality and corrup

tion of heart, which the nature-religions of heathenism did nothing to check, but rather fostered. In those religions every god had its representation in a visible idol, but the gods themselves were such as the natural heart desires — gods "whose attributes were pride, revenge, and lust;" while in Judaism there was, in the bosom of every service, a spiritual and holy God as the sole object of veneration, and conformity to His will the one great end to be aimed at. With the loss of a spirit of piety they became unfit for the duties of a pure service and ashamed of its sanctity, and accepted from their neighbours a more palatable religion. The same perversity lives in the Christian Church, and in every country in Christendom Israel's folly is perpetually repeating itself What is Popery but an accommodation of the pure spirit of the gospel to the grovelling tendencies of the flesh? And in Protestant lands the thoughts and maxims of the world are mixed up with those of the gospel, so that a compound is formed which the natural man does not quarrel with or blush for. Hence the spiritual languor, the worldly-mindedness, the numberless forms of vanity and pollution, which are so commonly seen going hand in hand with a religious profession, and which rob the Church of her power to conquer and bless the world. Nor can she fulfil her destiny or be safe from the rod of chastisement and rebuke till the foul admixtures are purged out, and in reliance on the Divine Word, and in unswerving adherence to righteousness and truth, she goes forth to resist and put down whatever is opposed to the will of Heaven.—*Fairbairn* (*abridged*).

5. Lamentation over the Desolated Land (Chap. vii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—In this chapter we have not so much an additional prophecy as a re-statement of principles and denunciations which had been already formulated. It affords abundant illustration of the tendency of Ezekiel to repeat his messages, and to use even the same forms of expression. But some of the repetition here must be, moreover, accounted for by the highly excited emotions under whose influence he wrote. That these emotions should take poetical modes—abrupt utterances, rhythmical combinations, refrains, and demand again and again an avowal, these are matters which may receive many confirmations from ancient and modern, from biblical and secular literatures. Especially might a prophet, who was abiding under the shadow of God and was suffering in the sufferings of His people, give forth the signs of strong feeling in his words, and they with appropriateness present hints of the mighty power which constrained him—of the divine voice which sounded in the chambers of his heart. We shall miss one purport of the message if we do not find it apprising us of visions suggesting the nature of the living and revealing Lord.

Vers. 1–4. *The imminence of the land's doom.*

Ver. 2. "Thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel, An end." It seems preferable to read, "*Thus saith the Lord God, Unto the country of Israel an end.*" By this reading it is more apparent that the prophet was not to address the country, but give a message respecting its impending downfall as a territory. This end was to be no minor end, but one in which many a past penalty culminated: "the end is come upon the four corners of the land." Events in our own generation have shown that invading armies give birth to outrages on persons, waste of stores of food, outbreaks of pestilent diseases. The unearthed Assyrian sculptures may be taken as proofs that all such calamities were still more hideously evolved by the armies of Chaldea. Once and again that "bitter and hasty nation" had launched its hordes across the land of Israel. They would not spare age or sex; they would burn up crops and destroy grain which they could not carry away; they would leave behind them, where they did leave any, a depressed, impoverished population, amongst whom

pestilence would find a wide field for its ravages. Every quarter of the region of Israel would have, as it were, come to its end when the Chaldean soldiers had made their last inroad, and there would be nothing more of a monarchy filled by the house of David.

Ver. 3. "**Now the end is upon thee**;" it is just at hand, and the harvest for which that and preceding generations has been sowing will be immediately reaped. Iniquity was full, and no more space for confessions and promises of amendment would be given. The end would come through the operations of the Lord: "**I will send**"—"**I will judge**" . . . "**I will recompense**" —*give, or lay*, &c.; but His operations would be instigated by the "**ways**" and "**abominations**" of the people.

Ver. 4. The three chief clauses have been stated before. The first agrees with chap. v. 11; the second with ver. 3, except that the threatenings here intimate a closer connection between the painful consequences to the people and their doings; "**I will lay upon thee thy ways**," is put for judging them *according to their ways;* and instead of *laying on them all their abominations*, as a burden external to them, "**thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee**," affecting from within as well as from without. The third clause is another repetition of the purpose with which this terrible end as well as other moral punishments was carried out, "**Ye shall know that I am the Lord**"

HOMILETICS.

Some Aspects of God's Government over Men.

Ezekiel, like the Hebrew prophets in general, saw the working of other than material forces among the inhabitants of the world, and that with a clearness which cannot be paralleled in any nation's records. In this short paragraph the traces of such insight are perceived to be set in no ambiguous phraseology.

I. **There is progressive spiritual development in human history.** The whole Bible, when rightly considered, is a witness to this. Each part of it is laid as an organic accretion on that part which went before. Nor is this conclusion to be referred only to events: it is as certain in regard to principles and truths. Moral and religious ideas and practices contained in the doctrine of Christ are seen to be vaguely and inadequately appreciated before they are clearly and more fully perceived. And not a thing of His is stationary. It will, doubtless, take new forms in the mind of every believer as he passes through the normal stages of growth. He is first a babe using milk, and he has to go on unto the stature of a perfect man. As it is with individuals, so is it with a nation and with the race. They will learn the evil of sin and the obligation of holiness, not by a sudden catastrophe and revelation, but by slowly evolving processes of loss and pain, of yearning and hope. The development may seem very often retarded, "the divine event," in which the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, may be far off, nevertheless *the* end shall come, for which other ends have been arrived at—the end at which all things shall be seen subjected to Him who is all in all.

II. **There is a signal doom for progressive phases of wrongdoing.** The Israelites had been again and again afflicted "very sore" because of their iniquities, but they had continued to possess something like a national life throughout those calamities. Their chastisement had produced no true amendment, however, and that judgment which should include in its operation the consequences of all their unrighteousness would entirely alter the aspects of the chosen people. They had been moving on to this catastrophe, and Ezekiel was enlightened to see its near approach. He understood the signs of his times; he interpreted their meaning, and pressed upon the understanding and consciences of the people the awful guilt

in which they were involved, by the sins of their fathers as by their own sins. He declared that there would be no suspension now; the end of Israel as a society, organised according to forces which had been existing for generations, was reached. Whatever may be its influence in the world hereafter, it will be exerted under different conditions from that of its past. The lines over which its future will move must be projected into new scenery. In signifying this fact the prophet may be held to propose two principles—

1. *All calamities are bound up in preceding events and tendencies.* An effect is nothing but the sequence of causes. However different it appears from them, not one thing is in it which is not the product of that which has gone before. There was no weight pressing the Jewish people into the dust which they had not lifted upon themselves; there was no stripe inflicted but was drawn down by a disobedience. The punishment was only another form of the abomination indulged in, as the slag is but another form of ingredients in metals which have been exposed to fire. We are what we are, we suffer what we suffer, not by any chance, but by reason of what has already happened to us. There is judgment and mercy in this. We learn what our disposition and conduct lead to. We shall bear our own burden, whatever it be, because we have first put our shoulder under the yoke which makes that burden.

2. *Calamities are specially painful in the last stage of critical changes.* Israel had grossly belied its God, had practised debasing superstitions, had walked amid the festering swamps of what was lowest and vilest. There was no remedy unless it might come through a judgment which would fill them with terror and anguish. By sword, famine, pestilence, the land would be harried. Yet the terribleness of the inflicted evil was but the incoming of wicked ways and defiling abominations to roost.

> "The wise gods seal our eyes
> In our own filth, drop our clear judgments, make us
> Adore our errors, laugh at us as we strut
> To our confusion."

The effort to turn unfair privileges into fairness for all, or to make bad laws into good, is never easy. The discomfiture of interests which are hurtful to the moral welfare of a people cannot be brought about without serious conflict and losses. The attempt to promulgate new land laws for Ireland, the struggle with the slave-power in the United States, the shattering of the *ancien regime* of France, the perilous turmoil of the Reformation, the destruction of feudalism throughout Europe, are witnesses that no revolution of thought or practice is painless. In a sense it is sin finding out the sinners, as in this end of Israel.

Such an end, however, introduces a new process. The old passes away never to reappear. The suffering which characterises the transition prepares for another condition in which trouble and pain may still be, but which is the foretoken of richer blessings in coming days.

III. There is a divine will shaping events. Natural or social forces cannot, when regarded simply as natural agents, light upon the persons who have done wickedly. They are weapons held in the hands of the righteous Lord. They strike where He directs them to, and with the weight which He chooses to employ. It is the tendency of our modern thinking to set forth the external phenomena as all that requires attention—as if we were to be concerned with the powder which exploded, and not with the person who had laid it and lighted the match. But it is the living Ruler who, in the operation of moral laws, gives to them their power to punish and to improve. Individuals and nations are not atoms vibrating under unconscious forces and sequences; they are sinners judged for their sins, and judged if so be they will learn righteousness and turn to Him who smites them. When He destroys one house it is that He may build another. When He buries the worm-pierced shell, it is that by its decomposition a more fertile soil may be formed.

It is thus throughout all generations. The Eternal God manifests no change in His judgments on right and wrong. All events convey indications of His judgment and of the winding up of earth's chequered story on the last day; and they also convey indications of His gracious purpose to make "the knowledge of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." How the judgment and the mercy will be worked into the changing thoughts of the world is too deep a problem for us to solve. But nevertheless we may hold unwaveringly to the principle that "the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations."

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 5–9. No necessity exists for supposing that the text of this strophe, on account of its close resemblance to the preceding verses, is corrupt. A better interpretation would make us believe that the deep feeling of the prophet's Lord seeks again to utter itself through the feeling of the prophet. It is natural to repeat a cry of anguish or a complaint under the pressure of that which distresses us.

Ver. 5. "**An evil,**" which is placed in a specially distinct light by the epithet added, "**an only evil, behold, is come.**" The calamity about to befall Israel would be of a singular kind, for which no parallel could be found (chap. v. 9). "The Lord will make an utter end; trouble shall not rise up the second time" (Nah. i. 9).

Ver. 6. This unique evil would be folded up in "**an end**" of Israel's state, which, now inevitable, "**is come.**" It had been slumbering, but "**the end watcheth for thee.**" It is wakeful and observant. It is, as a pent-up flood, held back by a sole remaining obstacle, and that also showing signs of giving way. The measure of iniquity is full and the condemnation will no more linger. "Behold, it is come," and includes in itself the completion of all that is embraced in the divine, righteous judgments.

Ver. 7. "**The morning.**" The Hebrew word thus translated is of uncertain import. Besides here and ver. 10, the only other place in which it occurs is Isa. xxviii. 5, and there it is translated by *diadem*. That meaning cannot be accepted for this chapter. A prophetical morning is generally applied to the breaking forth of light, deliverance, &c., yet an explanation seems requisite that is not in accordance with such an idea. The most favoured conclusion is that which connects the word with an allied root indicating that the word here means something which makes a round or circle, and is metaphorically interpreted of that which the revolution of time promotes: the *turn*, the fate, that which is destined "**is come unto thee . . . the day of trouble is near.**" The laws of Hebrew parallelism suggest that the word translated *trouble* is in a relation of contrast to the next clause of the verse, "**and not the sounding again of the mountains.**" This, as it stands, is somewhat unmeaning. To say that the phrase alludes to the joyous shoutings at vintage-time, and to understand it as intimating that there would be no more the exuberant joy of harvest upon the mountains, appears to be rather far-fetched. More probable is it that the allusion is to idolatrous festivities upon the mountains of Israel, as was illustrated by the prophets of Baal when, sacrificing to their god upon Mount Carmel, they made loud and prolonged sounds. We prefer to translate thus: *The day is near; a tumult*—as in a panic of fugitives from the sword and famine (cf. vi. 4–6)—*and not shouts* of idolaters when worshipping *upon the mountains*. The silence of death would fall upon the scenes where dishonour was done to the living God.

Ver. 8. The end cannot be retarded. "**Now will I shortly**"—immediately—"**pour out my fury upon thee.**" His judgment will not linger any more. The course of evil will take Israel into the woes and horrors produced by their own sins. The following clauses have been already presented, with slight verbal differences, in ver. 3, and ver. 9 is a similar repetition of ver. 4. "The abominations stand in Israel's midst not in their alluring, seductive form, but

with all the woe which comes in their train" (Haev). The point of definiteness which is to be recognised is the unchanging purpose of all the Lord's dealings. "Ye shall know that I the Lord smite." The people were to realise that it was really not the Chaldeans, but their Eternal Holy King who was inflicting the punishment and claiming recognition and submission. The Lord "the life-giver, who would die to preserve His children, but would rather slay them than they should live the servants of evil."

HOMILETICS.

Trouble on Trouble for Sin (vers. 5–9).

Human experiences have caused the formulating of such proverbs as "It never rains but it pours," "Misfortunes never come alone." If many who use such words make no reference, when another weight of suffering is laid upon one already imposed, to the primal power which maintains this course of affairs, there was no omission in respect to that power among the statements of Hebrew prophets. They discerned the shadowy movements of a righteous Ruler, producing not only an isolated trouble, but also clusters of troubles. They were well aware that truth, if unpalatable, required to be enforced again and again, and that a true lesson, which might not be learned under the infliction of one pain, might be learned when pain was followed by pain. The same method was observed in Him who "spake as never man spake." The stern repetition of "woe unto you," which Jesus deemed it fitting to emit, must have made the ears of scribes and Pharisees to tingle; even to-day the awe and dread survive when they are read. It seems established as a principle of divine procedure that transgressors may learn righteousness by reiterated judgments. We may receive directions as to a becoming way of regarding repeated trials from our prophet. He suggests—

I. That sufferings for sins will be completed. An evil first comes, and afterwards an evil which will make a singularly deep impression,—"an only evil." The end which utterly condemns the sin is not brought about at once. Stages of progress towards it are taken. Some of the sinners may repent, or may die before the last point is reached, but they who do arrive there have passed other stages previously. The suffering may be so slight that the individuals or nations affected can afford to make light of it and go on their usual way. It may be so serious that they stand for days or months in a sort of fear of doing wrong, then their goodness, like the morning cloud or early dew, vanishes away. The end of inflicting the various sufferings will, nevertheless, come. The house whose foundation has been laid in sand will be touched in successive years by casual floods, but not till the fatal year, when a dire flood will descend, shall the house be overthrown. A nation may continue for one century or more to indulge in luxurious living and to practise ungodly conduct; but the blows of truth and right will be repeated until the old evil state falls down. "Their feet will slide *in due time.*" They will reap what they have sown and the end of justice will be attained.

II. That sufferings for sins are of varying degrees. Similar sins may be chargeable against different individuals, but similar sufferings are not endured in consequence. It is a perplexity in modern days, as it was in the days of Job, and as insoluble to us as it was to him and his friends. The messages of Ezekiel threw a streak of light into our perplexity. They indicate that the utmost suffering—that which will be recognised as greater than any other—comes as a result of loosening the ties which should hold men to God. Let there be disregard to divine rights, and sooner or later there will be disregard to human rights. And when both God and our brethren are sinned against, the penalty for the misdeeds may well be felt as singular in its intensity, and evoke comments in marts of business as well as in meetings for religious objects. Thus the observant eye is

trained to see striking differences in the inflictions befalling men who go in wrong courses.

III. That sufferings for sin may be rapidly accelerated in their final stage. The Babylonian army kept hovering over Judea and now and then swooping down upon it; but at length, when that watchful foe came in aggravated wrath, the ruin of Jerusalem was speedily consummated, and the Jewish nationality was crumpled up as by a sudden blight. The Babylonian Empire in its turn, after resisting various shocks, fell to pieces as in a moment: "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain, and Darius the Mede took the kingdom" (Dan. v. 30, 31). Our generation has seen, in the war between France and Germany, how the Empire which had been raised by "gunpowder and glory" collapsed with startling abruptness. This event need not be taken to mean that the French Empire was deluding and wicked beyond all other governments; yet at least it may be taken to mean that "a short work on the earth" may be made with communities which allow themselves to be misled by interested and pretentious designs. They will not use time to repent till confusion seizes them. Whether that confusion will become ruinous, as was the case with Babylonia, or whether it will prepare for new conditions of national existence, as was the case with Israel, cannot be foretold by merely human perspicacity Any way the contingency is instructive in showing that it is not wise to make light of troubles which are regarded as inconsiderable. The moans of the forest-trees presage an approaching hurricane: slight pains prognosticate the attack of a virulent fever; and the temporal and mental sufferings which come in consequence of sins should ever be taken as warning of an end that may be destruction. What though you can bear the uneasiness or disregard it, yet remind yourselves that that brings no pledge of safety from a sad and fearful aggravation of trouble some day. "How are they brought into a desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors."

1. It becomes peoples and persons to be earnest in learning the lessons which are given by repeated disappointments, checks, pains, sorrows, lest evil come upon them from which they shall not escape.

2. It becomes them to stand in awe of the Invisible Worker whose varying processes manifest His will to restrain and to deliver from sin.

Renewed Assertion of the Approach of the Calamity (vers. 10–18).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 10. "Behold the day, behold it is come." It is remarkable with what unity the various prophets speak of the troubles which they threatened as culminating in a day. It seems as if they saw in calamities an ever-recurring omen of that day in which earth's story would be judged of as a whole. If that final judgment could not distinctly loom before their gaze, it cast its dark and troubled shadows across the scene in respect to which they had to utter the burden of the Lord. To us, as to them, all sufferings for wickedness are foretokens of the last great day, when the fire shall try every man's work and consume all that is not fit to abide in a renovated world wherein dwelleth righteousness. Those recurring days and their phenomena were already determined. "The [morning] destiny goes forth, the rod blossoms, pride buddeth." The reference of these words is not to an evil which germinated within the territory of Israel, but to an evil external to it, which was springing up and would become an instrument of execution. The rod is the rod of the Lord's anger—the rod of the oppressor, represented in the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar. Like a shoot his power was growing, giving signs of vigorous vitality, rapidly taking the form which would render it fit to strike hard, and to do so with a will energised by boasting pride.

Ver. 11. "Violence rises into a rod for wickedness." The cruelty and outrages of the Chaldeans, against which

the prophets Habakkuk and Jeremiah deal out strong invectives, would be methods for punishing the wicked doings of Israel. At the sight Ezekiel becomes too deeply affected to fill up with verbs the four following brief sentences, and he merely prefixes to each a negative. We might render them literally, in terms of the English version, "not from them, and not from their multitude, and not from them of them, and not wailing in them." The compression and uncertain allusions make the sense somewhat doubtful. Besides, the meanings assigned to the several words are not generally accepted, as marginal readings testify. The interpretation given in the Speaker's Commentary is: "The furious Chaldean has become an instrument of God's wrath, endued with power emanating not from the Jews, or from the multitude of the Jews, or from any of their children or people; nay, the destruction shall be so complete that none shall be left to make lamentation over them." Though this comment scarcely satisfies the demands of linguistic accuracy, it sufficiently shows the bearing of the prophet's utterances. The catastrophe would be such that no one would be left to resist. "Stroke will so come upon stroke that lamentation will be forgotten in despair. It is the highest degree of pain when the capacity to complain expires" (Heng.) The weight of scholarship, however, as to the last clause, gives for its translation, *and there is no attractiveness in them;* all that beauty of the Lord their God which had been upon them shall be consumed away and utterly disappear.

Ver. 12. In that state of affairs, property, upon which such high value is set, would produce no comfort. "Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn." "It is natural for the buyer to rejoice and for the seller to lament," but no ground of joy should be found in that which might seem to be a good purchase, because it will turn out to be a source of trouble and pain. There would be as little ground for grief in parting with property. The enemy would seize it all, taking goods, cattle, houses, land, without distinction of persons. "When slavery and captivity stare you in the face, rejoicing and mourning are equally absurd" (Jerome). And no one should be passed by, "because wrath is upon all its multitude;" upon all who dwell in the territory of Israel whose "end" is pronounced.

Ver. 13 is to be regarded as a development of what was just said concerning the universality of wrath. "The seller" is not to mourn, for he "shall not return to that which is sold." He may have become an exile; the fall in the value of property may have made it burdensome to hold; there may have been forced sales of substance which had been prized by the seller—he need not allow one regret. He will never find an opportunity to get back what he had thus let go: not "although they were yet alive," *i.e.*, whoever of the sellers might be counted among the living were not to cherish any hope that in time they should recover the property which they had sold. As parts of the surviving remnant they would be in a captive state from which they would have no restoration, or the waves of Chaldean rapine would so beat upon the whole territory as to obliterate every trace of former arrangements. Life would not bring back again past enjoyments. Again Ezekiel emphasises the indiscriminateness of the punishment: "for the vision" which he has described as shadowing forth the imminent evil "is upon," has reference to, "all its multitude." In the words which immediately follow, the prophet does not intimate a possible event happening to the multitude, but repeats that which had been already said of the seller—"he shall not return." Yet should any one suppose that, by fraud, violence, or other immoral way, he would be able to reassert his title to the possessions he once had, he must disabuse his mind of the folly, "neither shall any strengthen themselves in the iniquity of his life;" or, to put it literally, *and a man in the iniquity of his life—they shall not strengthen themselves.* The same movement, viz., from a single representative to all the individuals, which we see in the first half of the verse, is repeated in this last

clause, and scope is given for variety of translation. Keil's is, *and no one will strengthen himself as to his life through his iniquity.* But whatever order the words may be put into, the meaning is conveyed that no one whosoever, so long as he is alive, will have any ease by his iniquity; he will be weak and crippled still, unable to escape the doom of wrath.

Many commentators find in these two verses distinct references to the continued vigorous usages of the law for the jubilee year, according to which land and houses reverted to their original owners. It is, to say the least, doubtful if this idea can be sustained. That the phrases of the prophet are moulded by principles inherent in the law of jubilee is not at all unlikely, but that his popular phraseology should be held to intimate that the processes incident to that law were validly maintained is more than can be granted. It is very questionable whether the law was observed at all in the later periods of Jewish history, if in the earlier. The remarkable omission of any satisfactory indication of its operation, of course, cannot be pleaded as a proof that the enactment had become altogether obsolete; but it may be taken to show that, like the community of goods in the primitive Jerusalem Church, the plan became unworkable in a society fermenting with the elements of social changes. With the exception of a very few indecisive expressions in Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as this one here, not a single prophet has condemned neglect of jubilee enactments or acknowledged their fulfilment. Perhaps it should be regarded as a collateral proof of the law of jubilee being in abeyance, that that section of the law, which required Hebrew bond-servants to be set free in the jubilee year, was certainly disregarded in practice. Jeremiah (chap. xxxiv.) shows that there had been a momentary reaction towards obedience to the aforesaid section; but that unbrotherliness and greed had soon brought a return of the prohibited oppression. Man's failure to carry out such a law is not a sign that its principles are unsound or its practice impossible in human societies. Both it and the having all things common in Christian Churches have these characterising features, that God's authority is placed over all things, and that all men are brethren. We look for an age in which these shall be supremely prominent—the good time coming, when love shall reign over all the earth. Ezekiel mentions the development of the slighted principles of those old decrees as sure to appear in that new theocracy, whose details he will afterwards set forth (chap. xlvi. 16–18).

Vers. 14, 15. A more disastrous result than the depreciation and abandonment of property would be evident in the unhinged and demoralised spirit of the people. The biblical history of the Jews goes to prove that on the whole they were brave and courageous, ready both to defend themselves and attack others. This characteristic would be lost in the grievous period of the end so close at hand. "They have blown the trumpet, and," with the view "to make all ready"—a call to all capable of bearing arms is sounded, and they are summoned to stand equipped in every particular for meeting the foe. It is in vain; there is no martial response. It is not for want of men, money, weapons. Besides country, property, religion, life are at stake, "but none goeth forth to the battle." The consciousness of lying under divine punishment unmans them: "for my wrath is upon all the multitude thereof." This would be shown in the fatal sufferings which they would endure. They would be cut down in the open by the sword of the enemy. They would perish in pent-up streets or closed houses by hunger and disease. "The issues of death" would fatally work upon them.

Ver. 16. Yet the door of mercy will not be utterly walled up; some fugitives will reach safety through it, though they may be few. For them it is provided, and they "shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys." Those survivors will seek refuge in elevated, retired districts,

acting on the idea which was enunciated at a later day by Jesus of Nazareth, "Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains." In such a condition of hardship they will keep together—be like flocks of pigeons which have been disturbed in their resorts on the lower ground, and maintain a continual cooing among the rocky heights up to which they have flown for safety—"**all of them mourning**." Similar expressions used by other prophets indicate that the sound natural to doves was regarded by the Hebrews as suggestive of sorrow. Ewald says, "The Arabian poets still find in cooing the sounds of lamentation, as if the bird's notes came from a feeling of pain." In English poetry we find—

"The stockdove only through the forest coos,
Mournfully hoarse."

This mourning, on the part of all those who had escaped from the terrors of death, would be aggravated by an element for which there was no alleviating counteractive in earthly means; "**every one for his iniquity.**" Each sees not only that sin had been no defence, but also that it brings bitter regrets, and he could complain of its deceitfulness. This recoil from iniquity was not an unusual course for the Israelites. Successive eras of their national history furnish illustration of those words of Isaiah, "In trouble have they visited Thee; they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them." They could perceive, in the evils which befell them, tokens of the wrongs they had been guilty of, as no other people contemporary with them, and perhaps no people of any period whatever, could do. The rights of God over them were again and again brought into distinctness after seasons of effacement. They then recognised that relief was to be sought nowhere save in God alone, and they afflicted their souls before Him. Too often, with the majority, it was not with godly sorrow, but with the sorrow of the world. They grieved over the hard consequences of sin rather than over its dishonouring of the Father. They longed for the removal of its punishment rather than for deliverance from its power and guilt.

Vers. 17, 18. The weakness and general helplessness of the fugitives are depicted in strong figurative terms, "**All hands, all knees,**" as inadequate for their functions as if their strength had wholly slipped away—a repetition of the scene in the wilderness, when the children of Israel were smitten by the men of Ai and "the hearts of the people melted and became as water" (Josh. vii. 5). In addition to this, demonstrative expressions of defencelessness would be displayed. The conspicuous parts of their bodies would be visibly made to show their utter abandonment to fear and grief. "**Sackcloth**" would "**gird**" them; "**trembling**" would "**cover**" them; the "**shame**" of vexation and punishment would suffuse itself over their countenances, and "BALDNESS" overrun their "HEADS." The baldness might be self-inflicted in the manner narrated by Ezra (ix. 3), when he was overwhelmed with horror for the transgression of his people. It has been often said that such baldness was prohibited to Israel, but the reference usually made for that statement (Deut. xiv. 1) does not prove it. That verse speaks of taking hair from a certain part of the head only. At any rate, allusions in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah signify that depriving the head of its hair was not an uncommon procedure in seasons of deep grief.

HOMILETICS.

How Man's Destiny is Brought About.

"*The destiny goes forth, the rod blossoms, pride budeth, violence rises into a rod for wickedness*" (vers. 10, 11).

These words allude to the Babylonian monarchy as growing in power, and having in it the destiny to shatter the Jewish state for its persistent wrong courses

towards its covenanted Lord. We read them and see how, "to the sprouting of power which *can*, corresponds the blossoming of pride which *will*," be a terror and destruction. We are furnished with a representation in outline of the methods by which straying souls are recompensed according to their ways and abominations.

I. **Their destiny is not a fortuitous event.** It is a growth—a product of, it may be, hidden and manifold causes. Generally, we cannot tell how we had become liable to a cold, a fever, a face-ache or heart-palpitation; but our inability to trace the movements which culminated in the attack does not make us hesitate to say that we had come under influences sufficient to produce the indisposition. It was not a random blow. We have reason to take the same position in reference to all personal, to all national fears, losses, defeats. There is no such thing as accident, chance in human affairs. If we have to pass through fire and through water, they were in our way. If men ride over our heads, they were mounted on horses spurred to do so.

II. **Destiny is not from the mere fiat of God.** He works by law. He begins to act because of righteousness and truth. He continues to act for righteousness and truth. The nature of things moves towards the punishing of evil by operations which may be said to be outside of God, that is, by using forces which the Almighty One has called into existence. Every decree of His is therefore adapted to antecedent conditions. Violence rises up into a rod by no arbitrary will. The moral government of God may tend to an inevitable fate, but it is a reasonable one.

III. **Destiny is accomplished by fitting instruments.** I said, in agreement with the phraseology of the prophet, that destiny is a growth. Each kind of tree in growing appropriates those elements in the atmosphere and soil which are suited to its nature. The bread-fruit tree prepares to support the life of man, and the upas-tree to poison him. And in the moral realm the elaboration of good things to save man and of evil things to destroy him is always proceeding. When the time is ripe they arrive at their suitableness for use, and are capable of carrying out the destined event. But "the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous." Pride will smite pride, violent dealing will be crushed by violence. When men sin they set briers and thorns against the Lord who is in conflict with them; but it is only to see that He goes through them, that He burns them up together. He never stands perplexed because He has no instrument at hand to execute His holy law.

IV. **Destiny is the summing up of previous actions.** We say that violets are gathered for their sweet perfume and wheat for its nutritious qualities, and we mean that the different lots which befall them is due to those antecedent chemical operations which form their properties. We should say the same of every individual and every nation on whom scares, and pains, and loss, and ruin spread their blight. They took a course in which they gathered up certain materials. Whether those materials were drawn from the external or the internal world, both sorts became the means of bruising, tearing, killing those who had gathered them. "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself? . . . Thine own wickedness shall correct thee and thy backslidings shall reprove thee" (Jer. ii. 17, 19). It is foolish to speak of an evil destiny except as a consequence of foregoing faults.

1. *Punishment for sin comes slowly.* It is not the result of a force which appears suddenly on the stage of life. It is no hasty stroke for which there was not sufficient justification, and the incidence of which might cause valid regrets. It is a growth. The evil-doers may escape for a season, but in due season, sooner or later, according to the nature of the sin, they shall receive the just award on their deeds. Let not your hearts be set towards evil because the sentence against it is not executed speedily. Use the space given for repentance.

2. *Punishment for sin comes surely.* Human strength, wisdom, sympathy cannot stay the reproductive powers of nature, and they cannot annihilate the accumulating energies of moral evil. The cotton which will form the shroud for some of you

who are enjoying good health is to be plucked off sun-lit fields. The weather which will bring famine to you, prodigals, has begun its action upon the scenery begirding you. The disease which will render offensive the debauchee is finding nourishment in him for its germs. The death which will destroy those who are ungodly is on their foot-tracks, and will not miss its aim. Inevitable is the woe which will fall upon the head of the wicked. Nothing can interfere; nothing can save—nothing except a change of mind; nothing except submission to the love and power of God manifested in Jesus Christ our Lord!

Weak Points in Human Life (vers. 11–18).

Nature in its various forms—in himself and in what is external to himself—occupies man's interest and efforts. He is disposed to rest in its use. He does not "look through nature up to nature's God." But nature is from God, and man must be taught that in every one of its characteristics it is subjected to the authority of God's laws. If used according to His will, it is glorified: if contrary to His will, it must be made to appear weak as a prop for life on earth. Observe this weakness—

I. **In the common fate of men.** There is no abiding. We must needs die. The place that knows us now shall soon know us no more. Our beauty will consume away. Where is "populous No"? What has become of the Israelites of all generations? Whatever be the power of the forces which hold the activities of a single life, or whatever be the forces which go to constitute the life of a puissant nation, in either case the power is helpless to safeguard its subjects when they do wickedly. Iniquity, that is the poison which destroys strength, that the traitor which opens to the rod which brings death. The nature of man succumbs before the righteous fiat of God.

II. **In the precariousness of property.** Men make gold their hope, which is digged out of nature's reservoirs. They pride themselves when their goods are increased. They call their lands by their own names. Many are willing to sacrifice truth, honesty, peace, so as to get unrighteous gain in buying and selling. But no products of nature, however largely estimated and depended on as a security, can be retained in use. A time comes when they may be counted a burden and sorrow, and buyers and sellers be equally conscious that the possession of them is untenable, that they are too evanescent to give help in danger, and must take rank with the weak things of the world.

III. **In the failure of courage.** Human nature can furnish proofs of courage which dignify it, but fears of injury or death can cause the stoutest to lose their presence of mind, and panics fall upon individuals and bodies of men. Appeals to honour and patriotism and care for property are vain. The stirring notes of the trumpet are altogether powerless to incite to conflict. "None goeth to the battle." Before the wrath of God the multitude has no spirit left in it.

IV. **In the insecurity of a retreat.** The fugitive Israelites who had escaped sought a safe hiding-place, and that brought experiences which were almost worse than death. Our bodily nature cannot be hardened or protected against increasing troubles, nor does one kind of calamity guarantee us freedom from every other kind. Life may be preserved from extinction by sword or famine or pestilence, but the circumstances into which it is thrown may be full of fear and grief and torment. Ah! if men could only get away from all tribulation by fleeing from one form of it, how different would our natural life appear! But the pains which follow sin are not voided by any temporary punishment. Our wrongdoing may be seen and regretted; that does not avert sure penalty. Youth spent in sensual pleasures may be deeply and sincerely lamented, but the "wild oats" then sown leave seeds on the heart's soil which are not eradicated even after many a ploughing and harrowing. A ticket-of-leave convict finds his crime, however he may stand clear from

it now, will prevent any confidential employment. And when God rises up to punish, "mourning, sackcloth, horror, shame," go to show that the stripes needed, therefore just and suitable, will be inflicted "to the utmost lash." None can hide so as that God will be deceived.

What repentings should be kindled when we see the helpless character of the things we are so prone to trust! What fear lest God should be neglected and disobeyed!

It may be doubted whether the next verse should be connected with the preceding or the following verses. Though the casting away of all valuables would be a natural act in those who were fleeing for their lives, yet it is as natural in those who were exposed to death by famine in the siege. However, as reference is made hereafter to other precious things which had been employed as instruments of evil, it is preferable to consider that a change occurs here in the line of the prophet's thought. If the change seems abrupt, that is far from being out of harmony with the features of this chapter.

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — Ver. 19. Valuable things will be rejected. **"They shall cast their silver in the streets."** Retaining it in their houses would present inducements to the greed and cruelty of the foemen, and expose their persons to outrage: it will be put away: **"and their gold shall be discarded,** treated as an uncleanness and not to be touched—more precious than silver, it will be more vilely cast away. It is probable that their idols are included in this rejection if we take an illustration from Isaiah: "Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold; thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence" (xxx. 22). This utter repudiation of things so highly prized is grounded on the fact that no amount or form of the precious metals will help to safety, or protect from pain, fears, destruction: **"their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord; they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels."** Neither mental ease nor sufficient food would be attainable in those closing days of tribulation—**"because it is the stumbling-block of their iniquity."** They so applied the substantial wealth entrusted to them as to gratify their lusts; they made it into a means of sin, and fell over it into fearful woes.

It is questionable whether the words **"silver and gold,"** when associated in this manner, are ever applied in the Old Testament to money only. We must not read into its usage a modern idea. It refers them to money, and also to plate, ornaments, idol-images. And this is an indication that Ezekiel must refer to some other object than the precious metals in the following verse.

Ver. 20. Another feature of their guilt comes into view, **"As for the beauty of his ornament, he set it for pride."** We do not see in these expressions anything but the signs of wealth made into a matter for boasting. That people boast themselves in the multitude of riches is true; but if the Jews had some special glory, it is far more likely that they would pride themselves in that. And they had. If Canaan was "the glory of all lands," assuredly the Temple at Jerusalem was the summit of that glory. Ezekiel himself might be quoted to establish this application of the words, "I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength" (xxiv. 21). The thing which was the most glorious feature in Israel had been made into a thing for mere brag! **"and the images of their abominations, of their detestable things they made therein."** Examples of this degradation and abjuration of their most eminent privilege are found in the next chapter, **"therefore I give it to them as an unclean thing,"** the glory of their ornament is changed into that which is repulsive and unfit for the Lord.

Ver. 21. **"And I give it into the hands of the strangers for a prey, &c.,**

and they shall profane it." The heathen shall take possession of the city, the outward tokens of God's special dwelling with Israel be desecrated, and its glory be obliterated.

Ver. 22. **"And I turn away my face from them"**—from the people of Jerusalem probably, though reference may be to the foreigners, for whose doings He would seem not to care,—**"and they profane my secret."** It is unnecessary to supply *place* to the last word, whose meaning must be that which had been guarded by the Lord as His and fenced against all intruders. Hengstenberg understands it of their treasures, "the means of Israel, which are, as it were, the treasure of the Lord;" but it is, surely, more appropriately to be understood of the Temple with its Holy of Holies: "and" this shall be brought about when **"the robbers,"** lit. *those making breaches*, **"enter into it"**—the city—**"and profane it."** The repeated references to the profanation of what had been holy to the Lord signify how completely Israel had been estranged from Him, and how all places, even the holiest, would be open to the unhallowed presence of the ungodly nations.

Ver. 23. Ezekiel is addressed. The Lord, as it were, "indignant at the profanation, commands him to put an end to the doings of the enemy by the deportation of those who were left behind" (Haev.) **"Make the chain,"** that which was the badge of subjugation and with which the exiled Jews were fettered. Jeremiah records how he was let go by Nebuzar-adan from "being bound in chains among all that were carried away captive from Jerusalem and Judah" (xl. 1). City and land had brought the evil upon themselves, **"for the land is full of deeds of blood,"** not applied to acts of murder only, but to all acts which were counted as mortal sins, **"and the city is full of violence."** The prophet Micah had declared that Zion should be ploughed as a field because the Lord withdrew His presence, and among the causes of that desolation he puts, "They build up Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity" (iii. 10).

Ver. 24. **"And I will cause the evil ones of the nations to come,"** the worst of the heathen, those who were most notorious among surrounding peoples for their evil tempers and ways. The expression is similar to that in ver. 21, **"*the wicked of the earth*,"** and gives an indication of the strong and bitter feelings engendered amongst the Hebrews towards the Chaldeans, instances of which are found in other prophetical books also. Ewald regards such expressions as signifying that at this time the Babylonian Empire contained in it an element of rude, rough, and uncultivated warriors, while, at the same time, there must have been highly civilised population long settled in Nineveh or Babylon; **"and they shall possess their houses,"** a justification of the counsels given in vers. 12 and 13; **"and I make the pride of the strong to cease."** If it is felt that it would hardly do to regard the Jews as meriting this description "the strong," the reading of the Septuagint, which finds a confirmation in chap. xxxiii. 28, suggests an explanation, *the pride of their strength*. This is neither to be transmuted into *strong pride* nor into *proud splendour*, but to be taken as intimating that there was that belonging to them which they esteemed their special strength as a people. That that was their relation to the Lord God is confirmed by such phrases as these: "Thou art the glory of their strength;" "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion." That men may take pride in Him whom they do not obey is testified by the words of Jesus, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Their pride in that would fail, **"and their holy places shall be profaned;"** *their*, as if He would not acknowledge them as His even nominally.

"In these verses a threefold example is given of the divine *lex talionis*. . . . The people have abused their wealth by making idols of gold and silver, and all manner of ornaments for vainglorious display, so that it has become "the stumbling-block of their iniquity;" now it was to be seized as a spoil by the enemy, and, in respect to their deliver-

ance, should be found worthless as the mire of the streets. They have carried their abominations into God's sanctuary and defiled the secret place of the Most High; now the whole is to be laid open to the unhallowed feet of the stranger, and robbers are to be sent to walk at liberty where saints only should have been permitted to enter. They, by their daring wickedness, have made the land full of violence and blood, therefore shall they themselves be bound with a chain by the ungodly heathen, and their best possessions be turned into the prey of the lawless and the profane. '*Their* holy places shall be defiled,' as they have already defiled *mine*."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 25. On the existence of the Temple depended that of the Levitical priesthood, and when the former was desecrated, the means of expiation, which by that was connected with the priesthood, were withdrawn from Israel. So we read "**destruction comes,**" lit. *a cutting off comes.* We might translate, with Fairbairn, *a close comes*, or with Hengstenberg, who says, "properly *contraction*, in contrast with the expansion that is connected with all joyful prosperity—the state of restriction and diminution:" "**and they shall seek peace, and it is not.**" Peace—hardly with Nebuchadnezzar, but that which could be attained by the methods referred to in the next verses.

Ver. 26. The condition will be one of constant uncertainty and disappointment. "**Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour.**" "Stroke upon stroke does the ruin come, and it is intensified by reports, alarming accounts, which crowd together and increase the terror" (Keil); "**and they shall seek a vision from the prophet.**" They are at their wits' end; they do not wait on the Lord, but endeavour to make solace or encouragement come from prophets such as had spoken to them visions out of their own heart; but the prophets are either dumb, or, if they were told "Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits," they failed to present the visions that were sought for: "**and the law shall perish from the priest.**" The prophet Malachi makes it appear as an understood thing that the people "should seek the law at the priest's mouth." It is an inadequate interpretation which would confine "the law" which was sought from the priest simply to his reading out of that of Moses. He was to have reference made to him for his judgments on the rules which were given to be guides to right conduct and worship. Thus Deut. xvii. 10, "Thou shalt do according to the sentence which they shall declare unto thee from that place which the Lord shall choose." The priests gave decisions, by oracle or otherwise, in the sanctuary as to what was intended by the law. However, that function of the priesthood would altogether pass from it: "**and counsel from the elders**" shall also perish; wisdom and experience would not avail for giving suitable advice.

Ver. 27. All the population in its three classes would be dealt with in judgment. "**The king shall mourn, and the prince**"—the chiefs of the tribes and heads of families—"**shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of the land,**" *i.e.*, the commonalty as distinguished from the rulers, "**shall be troubled. I will do to them after their way,**" lit. *from their way, i.e.*, the Lord will take the cue for what He will do from what they have done; "**and with their judgments I will judge them, and they shall know that I am the Lord.**" By sufferings which flow from their own decisions they will be forced to acknowledge Him as Lord. "With these words, recurring in Ezekiel like a refrain, the first cycle of his prophecies closes."—*Hengstenberg.*

HOMILETICS.

The Withdrawal of the Lord's Presence.

To walk with God is man's highest privilege, to be forsaken by God is man's deepest woe; his history furnishes abundant evidence that he has been the subject

of both contingencies. Yet a people professing to serve the living God should not allow it to be doubtful what kind of answer must be returned to the questions, Is the Lord among us or not? Are we conducting ourselves so that He lifts up the light of His countenance upon us, or so that He hides His face from us? For the response does not relate merely to our comfort or the reverse; it relates to the feelings of God and the rights due to God from every faculty and condition of men. A help to indicate the position at which a true answer may be received is suggested by these closing sentences of Ezekiel's dirge upon downfallen Israel.

I. We learn what provokes the withdrawal of God's presence.

1. *It is not any arbitrariness on His part.* Deep experiences in spiritual things—experiences which it is to be feared are not so common now as then—led former generations of God's servants to coin this phrase, "The sovreign withdrawal of God's countenance." It has been handed on to us among the traditions received from our fathers, but it is a phrase we should be very loath to employ. They indeed explained it with provisos which sometimes shaded its objectionable features, but they left enough of it in view to make us feel that it cannot depict a true idea of God's action. To say that there are occasions when we cannot surmise the reasons why He should make us walk in darkness and have no light, is a very different statement from that which intimates that there is no call in our proceedings for His righteousness and love to rise up against us. "Thou art clear when thou judgest." In ourselves, in the conditions of His kingdom, will always be the latent if not obvious causes for the hiding of His face—never in any divine waywardness.

2. *It is incited by unholy demeanour.* There were iniquities among the Israelites of Ezekiel's time of no insignificant character. We might be disposed to ask, How could they fancy that, while doing such things, they would still be in the light of God? The answer comes to us from the true Judge of human ways, "They come not to the light lest their deeds should be reproved." But we do not need to inquire of Ezekiel's people respecting this inconsistency. Similar facts are manifest among our own people. (1.) *There is excessive appreciation of wealth.* Before it the truth and purity of many promising young persons go down into darkness. The honourableness and the attachment to Christian causes of maturer age have been discarded. Reports of proceedings in law-courts, less public reports of dealings in offices, warehouses, shops, go to prove that silver and gold, in some of their forms of value, lead into not a few "pernicious ways." When Mammon is loved and held to, what must be done with God? (2.) *There is immorality.* Sins which are liable to capital punishment, sins which seduce others, sins which stir up wearied hearts to cry to the Lord God of Sabaoth, "Do me justice on my adversary," are narrated day by day in our newspapers. How many more never find a record in earthly pages! When deeds of violence are rife they prove that the whole condition of a people is demoralised. When they may not be rife, but when the guiltless do not condemn unequivocally such as do take place, do not wage continual war against them, lest they should get themselves into trouble or soil their hands by the pitch of wickedness, then too is the condition unwholesome and the words come true, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you" (Isa. lix. 2).

3. *It is brought about by trifling with religious belief.* (1.) *For people to set it as a matter for pride is to trifle with it.* They treat it as a thing which adds to their importance or self-conceit; they do not humble themselves to it as to their master; they drive it from its rightful position, however beautiful they esteem it to be as an ornament. Hear the numbers who boast that they are Christian and not heathen, Roman Catholics and not Protestants, Church of England and not Nonconformists, Church-goers and not Sunday-excursionists, and their boast carries with it this undertone, "We do not understand the rights of God." The lonely glory of His service—presenting aspects which make it excel all other objects of

thought—is veiled and made comparatively trivial when regarded as a matter for self-glorification. (2.) *To adopt unauthorised observances is to trifle with it.* The Israelites did not turn the Lord out of His Temple. They did abandon acknowledgment of Him as their God above all. "They served the Lord and Baal." They made images of abominations and detestable things in the Lord's house. Such a course betokened that they could not seriously accept that which was their distinguishing knowledge, that the Lord was the only God. They ignored the truth, that to pay the semblance of worship to idols was rebellion against His claims which He could not condone by His presence remaining among them. Isaiah represents His decision thus, "When ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear" (i. 15). He did not want "vain oblations" then, and He does not want them now. If we use prayers, sacraments, special rites and services which private or churchly judgments institute as an indispensable addition to the faith on which we act for acceptance with God, we may not erect an idol-shrine in church or chamber, but we ascribe to the created a seat of honour along with the Creator, we show that we do not desire really to know what is His due, and our wilfulness becomes an offence which impels His withdrawal. In our days, as in former years, His Spirit is grieved, vexed, quenched by the provoking of those sons and daughters, "who have a name to live and they are dead," who have "a form of godliness and deny the power thereof." Truly they are triflers with what is most sacred and walk in darkness.

II. **We learn what follows the withdrawal of God's presence.** Ezekiel depicts the consequences as developed in body, temple, minds. They cannot be literally applied to other and Christian people, but they hint sufficiently at results which are likely to happen.

1. *Temporal distress.* Because God has turned away His face, money may be felt as a burden, houses be lost, prostration of physical health or courage unman us. He is the Lord of the body; He is the ruler of weather, germs, gases, trade, and certainly amongst us, as amongst men of old, temporal sufferings are made a means of showing that we have offended Him. Not that all such troubles are signs that He has withdrawn from us—Paul's thorn in the flesh is a proof of something else—but a painful experience of the first Church in Corinth had its source in trifling with God's presence. "For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep." "Thou didst hide Thy face and I was troubled." What the weight and the extension of the distress may be time only will manifest; but the fact that Israel was shaken by panics, obliterated as a nation, the survivors bound with chains and taken into a strange land, is a solemn warning as to the dire consequences which come from a withdrawal of God's gracious presence.

2. *Religious degradations.* (1.) *The worshippers will be counted unworthy to come before the Lord.* The sense of His presence being deadened, their hearts must become disqualified for His holy service. They may still give thanks at meals, they may still enter into a place for worship, they may still name themselves by the name of Christ, but they have lost faith, love, joy, peace, if ever they had one or other. The duty which might have been pervaded with the holiness of God is nothing but an engagement carried out really for the doers alone—theirs now, if formerly His. And what can be a man's religion when God is left out of it? What but "a delusion and a snare to men—what but a grief and offence to Him? Peace, they may say, but there is none. Woe be to us when our sanctuaries are nothing but *our* sanctuaries!" (2.) *Corrupting and destructive influences will dominate them.* "The wicked of the earth, the robbers enter in and profane" the place where His honour dwelt. "The profanation by the enemy is, alas! always preceded by the profanation on the part of the friends." And so has it happened in the Christian centuries. Churches abounded in Western Asia—enemies possess their heritage. Old creeds for whose truth men were once content to suffer and die are sneered at and neglected. "An unknown God" is not dignified with an altar, but coolly

relegated to an unapproachable cloudland. Men who wear the uniform of Christ's service decline to place themselves on the hill where His standard waves, and even supply ammunition to the opposing host. Thus do "those who make breaches" pass into the domain where God had professedly reigned. His ostensible religion is discredited and covered with shame. Holy things are profaned because He is displeased and hides His face.

3. *Collapse of social helpfulness.* Secular and spiritual persons will be useless to one another. We naturally betake ourselves to those persons whom we consider superior when we are in perplexity, sorrow, pain, accumulating difficulties. Such resort will be in vain if "the glory of God in the face of Jesus" is not beheld. Then religious intuition will fail to grasp any inspiration; theologians be unable to communicate real instruction, and men of experience suffer a stagnation of thought. Preachers, teachers, and tried believers are weak in themselves and powerless upon others so far as relates to the growth of the divine kingdom when they do not walk in the light. So it comes to pass that that which should be the religion of God is trodden under foot of men.

(1.) *We should be impressed with fear of the withdrawal of the Lord.* When Jesus is not with His professed people they are in dreary scenery. It is a dry and thirsty land where no water is. It is the desert in which rest may be sought for but cannot be found by those who have had deliverance from some unclean spirit, and out of which place they come to take up with seven other evil spirits, and so the last state becometh worse than the first. There is cause for fear.

(2.) *We should become very watchful.* If we perceive little or nothing of the anguish of our Shepherd as He prays for the lost sheep; if we are so cold or lukewarm in our affections as hardly ever sacrificing for Christ an earthly pleasure, or an hour of business, or a sum of money, then it is time for us to listen to the tender and poignant rebuke, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation."

Wealth Unserviceable (ver. 19).

I. **The creatures which promise the most help and raise expectations highest, in times of trouble can do little or nothing for us.** Judas's thirty pieces of silver could not still one throb of his conscience. Herod's royal robes, sceptre, crown, greatness could not protect him from the teeth of a few feeble worms. Not all your wealth can keep the plague out of the city, or secure your lives when it is come.

II. **Men tainted with covetousness lay up for they know not whom—for their enemies.** The Jews had vexed their heads, hearts, and hands to get houses and vineyards, silver and gold, and now strangers, men their souls hated, must possess their treasures. This misery is upon all accumulators, that they may spend twenty or thirty years in gathering that which a Babylonian, a bitter enemy to God and His people, may possess in an hour.

III. **Abuse of our estates defiles them and brings the wrath of God upon them.** When silver and gold maintain pride, lusts, and other ends than God hath appointed them, they are wronged and imbondaged, and are as an unclean thing. **Therefore is the curse brought upon all.**—*Greenhill.*

Increase of Evil Realised (ver. 26).

I. **When a people is under divine displeasure there is a succession of evils for them.** Saul and Pharaoh were so treated, and the misery of the wicked is that they shall perish rather a hundred times over than go unpunished.

II. **God proceeds by degrees and steps to severity of judgments.** First come drops, then some little streams, after that the strength. "He did not stir up all

His wrath;" but if sin grow God's anger grows. He begins with a little finger, if that do good He will stop; if not, you shall feel His hand, His arm, and weight of His loins.

III. Truths are not confined to any sort of men. Truths are not the inheritance of priests, prophets, popes, councils. The Lord is not tied to any rank, but is free to be where He pleases, to impart truth to whom He pleases, and to as few as He pleases. *Ubi tres sunt, ecclesia est*, said Tertullian, and they may have truth among them and more given to them.

IV. God gives and takes away vision, law, counsel. He creates light and darkness. If you spurn at any light, any truths of God, you may lose them all. He sends "strong delusions," but He says also, "Come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."

V. Those who will not do what they know shall not know what to do. Adam, Saul, and others. Jeremiah bade Zedekiah and the rest go forth and yield themselves, but they did it not, and quickly after no vision, no law, no counsel, and they knew not which way to turn.

VI. They that will not know God in the way of His mercies shall know Him in the way of His judgments.—*Greenhill.*

III.—FURTHER PROPHETIC ACTION IMPOSED ON EZEKIEL.

CHAPS. VIII.—XIX.

Ezekiel has recorded the circumstances in which he received his call to be a prophet, and then the signs and words by which he was to signify the doom that awaited the whole of his people, because of their clamant iniquities. Fourteen months pass over him, and no other communication from the Lord is related. At the end of that time the power of God once more affects him, and imparts to him a succession of experiences, which are all ranged under one date. As in the preceding, so in this cycle of his prophecies he begins with a vision and ends with a dirge. "Here also he strives against political dreams, represents the destruction as inevitable, and points to repentance as the only way of safety."—*Hengstenberg.*

1. VISION OF THE SINS AND JUDGMENT OF JERUSALEM (Chaps. viii.–xi.)

Here we find not only a symbolical representation of the supreme glory and power of the God of Israel, but also of the procedure of the people. This is accomplished by putting Ezekiel in a kind of constraint, and that in the presence of onlookers. Did this visit of the elders cause an excitement in the sensitive prophet, and so prepare his mind for impressions from the Divine? Their visit is a significant fact. It shows that Ezekiel was no mere cipher among the units of banished Jews. Whatever had been their words and their looks respecting him, he became too much of a power amongst them to be insulted only. He was observed, and his confinement to his house was considered not as a result of ailment merely, but as a condition demanding general interest. Whether the people realised that he was "a messenger of the Lord of Hosts," and the elders came sincerely to inquire "what saith the Lord?" may be doubted; but that this was the case after a few years is certified (chap. xxxiii. 30).

The constraint imposed on Ezekiel by the action of the Lord was that in which the external senses are apparently cast into an unsusceptible state. He was thus withdrawn from the relation to his house and the elders in which he seemed to be, and was rendered capable of receiving impressions of things far remote from his physical environment. Involuntary on his part though his state might be, there was no abeyance in the action of his chief faculties. He could internally see, hear, speak; his spirit is liberated and strengthened instead of clogged. The

overruling force directs his attention to the Jews who had not been deported, and especially to the procedure of the dwellers in Jerusalem.

No indication is given of the length of time passed in his ecstasy. The elders may not have remained so long as his perception of external things was in suspense; but they may, as visional events proceed more rapidly than external. They would have seen a rigid and sudden prostration of the prophet's body, and heard his ominous cry (chaps. ix. 8, xi. 13), and the phraseology of chap. xi. 25, may be understood to mean that on his return to consciousness he described to *them*, as representing "them of the captivity," all that had been shown to him. "The supernatural being once recognised as having a place in the dealing of God with man, we ought to be open to evidence as to facts in every individual case" (*Campbell*), and abide in the light of the messages.

(1.) A Survey of the Four Abominations in Jerusalem (Chap. viii.)

This experience of Ezekiel could be only an internal one, and was intended to make him perceptive of the ungodly ways of his contemporaries who were left in Judea.

Prelude to a view of the abominations (vers. 1–4).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month.**" Since his first vision, Ezekiel's time had been divided into 7 days, 390 days, and 40 days, in all 437 days. Reckoning up to the date here given, 14 months had passed, and, as lunar months, they would make 413 days. Were we to consider that the prophet lay on his sides for 390 + 40 days in external appearance, we should be at a loss to explain the discrepancy between 413 and 430, or else we should conclude that this ecstasy happened to Ezekiel while he lay upon his right side for Judah; *i.e.*, he would be disturbed in the process of executing one commission by the interruption of another. As this seems improbable, we suppose that he had fulfilled his appointment in some form, but not literally. The next expression supports that opinion. "**I sat in my house,**" as he had been commanded (chap. iii. 24). Keil says that the verb is "used in the more general sense of staying or living in the house." We keep to the more restricted meaning, because the same verb is employed in reference to the elders. He and they were in the same posture in his house. He was not on his side; and though in seclusion, yet it was a seclusion which did not prevent his neighbours from observing him or conversing with him; "**and the elders of Judah were sitting before me;**" the civil organisation, which existed from the primitive times of Israel, was kept up among the captive Jews. The Babylonian government did not imperil its own quietness by nullifying the authority of the elders. *That* was allowed—no doubt to the advantage of captor and captive. Some special motive must have induced these head men of Judah to wait seated in the prophet's house. Its nature is not mentioned; but the communications he makes to them offer the probable clue; "**and the hand of the Lord fell there upon me:**" a sudden and palpable change in Ezekiel's aspect is intimated by the word *fell*—it is not used in the other two cases (chap. i. 3, iii. 22)—one of those symptoms which are chiefly observed in persons of a high-strung, nervous temperament. He was rapt out of control of himself. Under this influence the people of Jerusalem chiefly became the objects of his study, and he afterwards communicated his descriptions and denunciations to the elders of the captives. It would seem that tidings of the prophecies of Ezekiel had reached the city, and produced in the minds of its inhabitants a despisal of those who were in exile. "They were separated from the privileges of worship in the Holy Temple; they must bear their troubles and not

look for a return to their confiscated property; they should know that possession of the land was secured to the people remaining in Jerusalem, who were, in their own esteem, the favoured of the Lord" (chap. xi. 15). Reports of some such words had come to the ears of the captives. They felt aggrieved, and they presented themselves before the prophet to learn what he had to say in reference to that consequence of his prophecies, and also the course which should be taken in regard to this cynical treatment by their brethren. The answer is conveyed in the vision which Ezekiel narrates.

Ver. 2. "And I beheld, and, lo, a likeness as the appearance of fire," &c. The Sept. reads *man* instead of *fire*. It is a correction which is unnecessary, and may be regarded as a mistake. The earlier manifestation (chap. i. 26, 27) showed indeed the appearance of a man upon the throne. That was not visible now. What was visible was that part which displayed the fire of the lower members and the brightness of the upper glowing like ore. Thus Ezekiel sees at first, "below, towards the earth, the person on the throne appeared in the glowing ire of His function as judge and avenger, above in the pure splendour of His calm, untroubled heavenly majesty."—*Züllig.*

Ver. 3. "And He put forth the form of a hand." He whose glory was present to the prophet was not materially acting—His hand was visionary; "and He took me by the front hair of my head," as if to give an unimpeded view to him by holding him so as to make him look straight before him. It was not to carry him: another agency does that; "and a spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven;" or, *a wind lifted me up*, an interpretation which may be defended on the ground that the Hebrew word, which signifies both wind and spirit, is used with a distinction when Ezekiel tells of the cessation of his ecstasy (chap. xi. 24). Like Paul, he could not tell whether he was out of the body, or in the body. He knew this, that the power of the Mighty One was investing him with marvellous capabilities which needed no physical forces to sustain them. It is interesting to note that while Matthew reports our Lord as saying, "If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you," Luke reports Him as saying, "If I by the finger of God cast out," &c., thus illustrating, as here, the varying aspects of spiritual influence. That spiritual domination over Ezekiel placed him not at his own point of view but at that of the Lord. He saw the evils of his people, not by the insight of his own nature, but by the revealing light of God, and he condemned them as from His righteous sentences: "and brought me to Jerusalem in visions of God;" in this rapt condition he seemed taken to the Temple, and "to the opening of the gate of the inner (court) that looks toward the north." He was on the northern face of the Temple, and at that opening which made a communication between the outer court, that of the people, and the inner court, that of the priests. That entrance to the more sacred part of the building was in the face of "where is the seat of the image of jealousy:" this is meant to define Ezekiel's standing-place, not to define the worshipped object. The reference to it follows in ver. 5. The position at the north side is indicative of the quarter from which both the sin and punishment of Jerusalem were chiefly derived, "which provoketh to jealousy." Idols are an offence to "the jealous, energetic God, who, as such, gives not His honour to another, and calls forth His reaction against the wrong done to His honour" (*Heng.*). He cannot renounce His rights, and shows that He will not.

Ver. 4. In the place He is dishonoured He gives tokens of His power and glory: "and, behold, there was the glory of the God of Israel, like the vision that I saw in the valley." The appearance of fire which Ezekiel saw in his house seems not to have shown throne or cherubim or wheels. Now that he is in the Temple, the complete glory becomes manifest to him as

he had already seen it in the valley near Tel-Abib. Its presence is a sign that the God of Israel will search into all the secrets of His people's worship, and that whatever is inconsistent with the glory of His power, wisdom, holiness, love, among those who are left in Judea, will be laid bare and denounced. It cannot be said that the practices which were thus unveiled must have been confined to the precincts of the Temple. Those various forms of unhallowed worship could hardly be going on at the same time and within its comparatively limited space; and it may be questioned if certain of them were ever transacted therein. The vision is symbolical. The mere eye of flesh did not see what was done, but a spiritual imagination did. It recognised the Temple as the centre of the national life—the natural meeting-place for all Israelitish religious thought, and a focus for the abominations which were committed in the land. This idea is supported by the words of Jeremiah (vii. 10), "Ye come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations." And yet he writes (ver. 17) as if they committed them elsewhere: "Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem?" Ezekiel's vision includes the four chief manifestations of evil among the people, in public and in the dark, and becomes a striking picture of the apostasy of the house of Israel.

First abomination (vers. 5 and 6).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 5. The prophet, standing by the gate of the inner court, is commanded, by a voice from the glorious appearance, to consider the idolatrous figure confronting him. "And I lifted up my eyes . . . and behold northward of the gate of the altar," standing in the outer court so that it was in the way of all who came in view of, or passed through that gate which was called the gate of the altar, probably because it led to the spot where sacrificial animals were slain, this image of jealousy at the entrance. Various conjectures are made as to the special object represented by this image — Baal, Moloch, Astarte. It is preferable to regard it as a figure which embodied in its shape the ever-working tendency to associate the worship of idols with that of the Lord God, and thus to idealise the opposition which was perceived by Him among those who trod His courts.

Ver. 6. "Seest thou . . . the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here," they seem to pay divine homage to images as often as they pay it to me. They may not purpose the certain result of such procedure, but it cannot fail to happen, and that is "in order to be far off from my sanctuary." Who is meant—the people or the Lord? Not the former, but, what is unspeakably more terrific, the latter, as was illustrated at the close of this manifestation (chap. xi. 23). "My glory I will not give to another;" therefore He writes "Ichabod" on His Temple in Jerusalem: "and turn again, thou shalt see great abominations."

HOMILETICS.

God's Ways made Known (vers. 1–4).

The methods by which the Father of spirits communicates with human hearts are wrapt in symbol and mystery. We do not know how the life in plants concurs in their growth; we know that it does by the effects on them. And a man may not be able to explain how he has obtained a consciousness of God, yet unhesitatingly premise that he has the witness in himself that God has come to him and given him power.

I. He receives this power amid the ordinary conditions of life; within the

walls of his own house, a sufferer under ailments, with a few companions, he realises that the Lord has visited him. "He besets us behind and before, and lays His hand upon us" wheresoever He will. The idea that He may affect us is sometimes a source of fear and repulsion. This is to discredit God. Why should not the possibility of His power manifesting itself to us, anywhere and at any time, be esteemed as one of the highest privileges of our life? His visits may be made:

1. *In seasons of trouble.* The elders and exiles, flouted by their unbanished brethren, received good from the Lord by means of His word to Ezekiel. They learned that though far from their sacred Temple they were not forgotten by its Lord; that though despised as outcasts, they knew that His prophet was among them; that their iniquities had not taken away His truth and mercy from them. The needy cried to Him, and He sent from above to alleviate their need just where they felt it.

2. *In personal associations.* The power that came to Ezekiel and the elders came in private. It seems to be the usual course. Prophets and apostles were specially influenced by the Lord when they were away from ordinary stated worship. This was not meant to disparage assemblies for public religious services; it was rather to signify that, if we are to learn effectively that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, we must be alone, or with two or three gathered in His name. God honours not the service but the servants, and while public means have their own place among the ordinances of His kingdom, they must not be supposed to secure for us "power from on high." From the Lord we must expect "grace to help in time of need"—not from any mere means even though called sacred. "Blessed is he that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors."

II. **The Divine Spirit produces new experiences.**

1. *There are fresh impulses.* The common routine of thought is broken through. The feeling of a new presence touching our inner man becomes definite. A prophet sees the brightness of a radiating glory; apostles behold "the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father;" any man who calls Jesus Lord has a revelation within of the light of the knowledge of His glory. All of them feel and know that they are brought into contact with a strength that is made perfect in weakness—the impelling of the Holy Spirit.

2. *There is an exaltation of heart.* Ezekiel felt lifted above the ground by a spirit. "Between earth and heaven" he sees wider views. He moves amidst rays from God. When we have a plainer and ampler sight given to us of the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, how differently we look upon our own needs and the needs of other men. We may sigh, we may lift up longing eyes, we may bend our heads and knees, but we do so because our hearts testify that they have "the Presence infinite" which makes its creatures blessed. Self and the world keep our spiritual life down; but the uplifting of the Holy Spirit enables us to "mount up with wings as eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint." Evermore give us this power.

3. *There is a clearer understanding of the religious condition of a people.* The prophet saw the abominations which the house of Israel committed, by the penetrating power of the glory of God in the Temple. Nothing like a display of the character of God to make sin appear, and to make it appear "exceeding sinful." Even if we be not addicted to the same iniquities as other men may be, our standing in the light of God's countenance will enable us to discover their sins, and so to speak of them that they shall be convicted in their own consciences that we speak the truth, that the evils which we portray are their evils. So a motive may be given for repentance towards God. We learn to cherish:

1. *A certitude that God will teach His ways.* Faithfulness in little opens a way for the reception of much which will demand faithfulness. Obedience to many commandments of Christ prepares for learning commandments that are yet unrecog

nised. They who grow in grace grow in knowledge of Jesus Christ. The variety of forms which His teaching takes does not weaken but strengthens the conviction that He will teach. So it comes to pass that multitudes of persons can avow that He who was once an unknown God is now honoured as a Father; that the Christ who was once admired is now adored as a Saviour and King; that the persons with whom they are brought into association are regarded with a heightened and distinctive sympathy. They have learned from Him who gives rest to their soul, and they trust to Him to teach them still. Whereas they were blind now they see, and they are sure that He who has opened their eyes will point out their way and inform them of all its dangers and its provisions.

2. *A hope of special teaching.* Unlooked-for changes, perplexities, difficulties appear. Does one revelation, does a series of instructions for one's common way of life, exhaust His supplies? No; "all things work together for good." Let all things be against us, that does not show that God is unable to take us through them all. It only shows that we must not lose heart and hope; that we must wait for Him when He is not in view; that we must trust that the all-sufficiency of heavenly power and love is acting with steady force, though impalpable for a time. "Now we see in a mirror darkly," but enough to satisfy us that all needed light will be shed, that human sins will not prevail against the rule of God.

Vain Worship (vers. 5 and 6).

The spirit and truth which are needful in serving the Holy One of Israel are often absent from those who profess to worship Him. Individual worship and common worship are equally faulty as to this, and call forth the stern appeal from the great King, "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination to me." He thus repels the worship because—

I. It is divided. The worshippers set up an image in His courts. They acknowledged Him, but He was not the only one regarded. They mingled up in what they did for Him a reference to some custom of other people, or some misapprehension of their own mind. They did not submit themselves to the inalienable rights of God. The rite or ceremony may be very attractive to the eye or ear, generation after generation may have found it agreeable, but the condemnation stamped on it is "God alone is not here!" Many prayers which seem earnest are not answered because they supplicate for gratification to some lust of the flesh or mind. Many a religious meeting dissolves as a vapour wherein no appearance of God is traceable, because they have not come to the Father only by Christ. Get a single eye, purify hearts by faith, search out all doublemindedness in private or public means of worship, lest God go far off, refusing to accept and hear. "Beside Him there is no God," and a divided worship is worthless.

II. It belies His character. *He is supreme.* It is impossible for any created thing to share His sovereign authority, and any kind of worship which reverences an idol, or a form, or an idea of man's heart, must, by its very nature, be repudiated as an abomination. Who dare presume to ascend the throne of the Almighty! *He is righteous.* Jealousy amongst men is tainted to a greater or less degree by selfish elements. We cannot bear a thing because it somehow shadows our contracted range of view, does not let us step easily on to our own comfort. In God's jealousy there is no element but what is true, and holy, and kind. He cannot give up such principles if He is to continue to govern the world. He maintains "the integrity and dignity of His own position in the face of every free being." It is the rights of God and with them the rights of every moral being which vibrate in the words, "The Lord shall be jealous for His great name;" and that He should be provoked by honour given to another is to be true to the claims which human nature makes upon Him who formed it to be good. *He is accessible.* The image of jealousy stood in the very face of the Lord's altar, as if He were to be served

only after an idol had been acknowledged; as if the first step towards Him must be taken by the help of that which is not God. In Christian service we too frequently fancy that if we first pray, or read the Scriptures, or fast, we shall find the Lord easier of access. Alas for us! if we do not learn that He is nigh to all that call upon Him, that between the High-priestly Son and them nothing should intervene, that to use any other mediator is to make a movement which tends to put Him far off. Not that He does not see, does not care for the worshippers He may forsake; but that they may learn that they have treated Him as if He were a retired or an absent God. Forms of worship thus become a mere ceremonial. Darkness and deadness cover the heart, and He cannot but count vain that which by act takes from His character its authority, justice, and immediate presence.

III. It is made obvious to God-fearing men. "Son of man, seest thou what they do?" Dare he consider the abominations? Yes; *if in obedience to the Lord.* Ezekiel lifted up his eyes to see the abominations, not because he wanted to look on evil, or because he thought his soul strong enough to venture without harm "among serpents;" but because the Lord told him to do so. We may look upon things which offend God—bad books, besotted men and women, unscriptural practices in worship—but we need to beware of the danger in such procedure. Many a youth has committed evil because he wanted to see what it was like. Many a worshipper has gone to look at forms of worship with which he was not familiar, and lost his power to distinguish between that mode of service which leads to Christ and that which draws away from Him—between a fruitful worship and a vain. And if at times there does not appear sufficient ground for judging whether or not a certain worship veils the glory of Christ, the true way in which it can be made clear is to give honest answer to the question, Shall I be obeying the Lord Jesus Christ in attending on this thing? The weak conscience is defiled, the strong in the Lord is made able to stand. One goes into the lion's den and is safe, for God sends him; many go and are torn in pieces, for their own will moves them. We touch a great principle for our guidance in worship when we say that wrong against God is plain to those who fear His great name. Yes; *if he is to be fit to act as a watchman.* Ezekiel looked at the image of jealousy, but it was that he might say, "God will withdraw if that is honoured." Jesus ate with publicans and sinners, but it was that He might call them to repentance. And if we be disposed to observe any unholy thing, it must be with the desire so to know it that we shall see its offensiveness to God, and shall warn the men who sanction it that they are sinning against the only true God.

God's Disclosure of Sin (vers. 6, 13, 15).

The disclosure shows—

I. There are degrees of wickedness—"greater abominations." The longer we look the more we see. There is a sin of ignorance like Paul's—"I did it ignorantly in unbelief"—and sins of knowledge like those who "sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth." Some sins withhold the honour which is due the Lord in worship; other sins act against His laws of conduct, and prostitute the powers of manhood and womanhood in brutal license.

II. Knowledge of the degrees of wickedness is not acquired all at once. "Thou shalt see greater." The first conscious sin is no evidence of other sins which will be committed by *an individual.* He begins to court the will to be rich, and then comes the will to lie, cheat, steal; or the desire for power, and then come deeds of injustice, oppression, murder; or neglected worship, and then "they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." *The evils in churches are gradually recognised.* They may be indulged in by many, and who discovers at once that the stream is tending to the wrong quarter? They may be kept from honest probing, and how can we test their danger? They

may be undetected because we have been accustomed always to see them, and where is the power to show their offensiveness to the Lord? Once brought to see one allowed course in its sinfulness, we may be brought to see others also. We need to have eyes opened that we may see, and we shall find that "in the lowest deep there is a lower deep still threatening to devour."

III. **The light of God alone unveils the amount of wickedness.** He has a time and ways of discovering what is in our hearts, what in our societies. We must look by it, walk in it if we are to remember whence we are fallen and not have our candlestick moved out of its place. Let us wait on the Lord Jesus Christ that in His light we may see the light for our own state and the state of others "It is time for Thee to work, for men have made void Thy law."

Second abomination (vers. 7–12).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 7. The prophet having turned, he says, "**He brought me to the opening of the court;**" his position being changed, he must have been taken to some other door than that mentioned in ver. 3, most probably to the opening which led from the outer court into unwalled space; the worshippers would thus be less exposed to observation than if they had to cross the court to the inner gate. "**and I saw and, behold, a hole in the wall,**" but too small for him to pass through, and a mode of ingress must be made.

Ver. 8. At the command of the Lord he dug out part of the wall, as Eastern robbers do, and, entering by the breach, "**behold an opening**" which the wall concealed, and so was known to the initiated alone. The seer has the key which opens it—the word of the Lord.

Ver. 9. "**Come and see the wicked abominations which they are doing here.**" Ezekiel was moving in the region of symbols. The hole; the door walled in; a secret worship by elders; a large room, within the Temple-precincts, having its walls covered with the figures of various animals representing the visible powers of nature, are all tokens that it was not a real sight he was looking on—that it was a representation of the masked and wide-spread guilt of the mass of the people.

Ver. 10. "**And I came and saw; and, behold, every form of reptiles and cattle, abomination, and,**" besides those animal figures, there were representatives "**of all the refuse idols of the house of Israel portrayed upon the wall round about.**" Ancient writers, and tombs opened in recent times, show how common was the practice in Egypt of decorating their walls with painted figures, while the worship of animals in that country was long the popular form of worship. It seems as if this prominence given to Egyptian habits had reference to the leanings towards that government of many among the leading men of Jerusalem, and to their efforts to bring about an alliance offensive and defensive. Allusions, in the larger prophetical books especially, prove that there was a political party among the Jews whose cry was, "Let us go down to Egypt for help!" Now that the Babylonian power was in the ascendancy, that party was obliged to resort to underhand schemes, to secret meetings and proceedings, with the hope, no doubt, that they might contrive, with the aid of Egypt, to get rid of the Chaldean yoke. The Jewish people were not contented with their compromises with Egypt, they also adopted other varieties of idol-worship. The new forms did not prevail so as to extirpate the old, and overwhelming superstition spread over the covenanted land. Thus did created things become an abomination. Good in themselves, they were placed by the people alongside of the Lord God, if not above Him, and became objects of His loathing.

Ver. 11. "**And seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel.**" The number is historical (Exod. xxiv. 1; Num. xi. 16). It is not to be understood here of a standing council of the people, but of an ideal representation

of them as a whole. The contrast between the present provocation of the Lord and the honour paid to Him formerly by the seventy is also to be considered. "To render the contrast still more palpable between what was and what should have been," it is added, "and Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing in their midst;" why he was so conspicuous is unknown. He was one of a family of Jewish statesmen. His father was the patriotic and God-fearing scribe—chancellor—of King Josiah during his reforming reign (2 Kings xxii. 3, *ff.*). Another son was Ahikam, who, as also *his* son Gedaliah, nobly stood for Jeremiah (Jer. xxvi. 24, xxxix. 14). Jaazaniah had apparently deserted the purer traditions of his family and become prominent among the idolatrous and Egyptian party. It is a sad but not an isolated spectacle. Righteousness does not run by a law of heredity. "were standing before them,' *i.e.*, before the figures drawn on the walls, "and each man with his censer in his hand," thus assuming a prerogative of priesthood, and in the posture of performing an act of worship of the highest kind. "and a prayer of the cloud of incense was going up." The A. V. has "a thick cloud." The only other place where the Hebrew word is found gives in its translation "suppliants" (Zech. iii. 10). In biblical language, the ascending incense is symbolic of prayer—"the twenty-four elders having each one golden bowl full of incense which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. v. 8). On these grounds we prefer to read here "prayer."

Ver. 12. The interpretation comes. "Hast thou seen, son of man, what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark:" that this abomination was to be sought for in such a secrecy, while the others were seen in the open daylight, supports the idea that the former was maintained for the furtherance of occult political aspirations—aspirations which the Providence of God would not sanction: "each man in the chambers of his imagery?"—rooms in which images were delineated. Each of the seventy had such a chamber for himself—a place in which he installed his own special favourite objects of worship. It is indicative of the addiction in private houses to the unhallowed ceremonies which the prophet beheld in the light of God. Proceedings like these gave practical expression to the thought, "the Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land." They did not deny the Lord's existence, they used His name; but their conduct was tantamount to reducing Him to a nonentity in the world, for it denied His knowledge and mercy. To put a fact into the terms of a popular saying is one of the features of Ezekiel's style, and is a mode of intimating that the thoughts so embodied in speech were not mere hasty and transient impressions, but were the outcome of habitual choosing their own ways and forsaking those of the Lord. When such notions about Him were cherished, apostasy from Him was, not probable only, but certain. Men might live as they liked, they might despise God, they might tempt and deceive their fellowmen, no account would be demanded. God saw not. They may degrade the worship of a people, they may corrupt the moral atmosphere of a city, they may strive to promote political ends, both at home and abroad, which shall be unworthy of a high-minded people. They allow no scrupulous afterthoughts to hold them back. God has forsaken the land—a nation has no God, no eternally righteous law to obey!

HOMILETICS.

Corruption of True Worship.

Account for it as philosophers may, the fact is patent that most men will worship. They are in the abyss of savagery, or they plume themselves on the

summit of the highest civilisation of centuries, and at not one stage, from the lowest to the highest point of the long slope, is there a belt of which it can be said, "Worship was never made within its limits." The object of such worship as is rendered may be a fetish, or a Spirit infinite, eternal, and unchangeable; but in each variation there is understood to be the existence of something in which power resides. The tendency thus universally observed, like all human tendencies, is susceptible to change of direction. As certain elements in nutritious food are adapted to build up a healthy body, so there are certain elements required in worship to meet the wants of a human being as he stands related to the Power which made him and fashioned him. As food may be used lavishly or sparingly and produce diseases incident to over-indulgence or insufficiency; or as good food may be refused and hurtful taken instead, so worship may be carried out to strengthen or weaken, to elevate or degrade the soul; or that worship which is right and true be forsaken for that which is false and destructive. The features of the latter delineated here are—

I. It takes a place among purer forms. The Jewish elders, burning incense before animal figures and other objects, stood within the area of the Temple dedicated to the honour of the only living and true God. They practised their dark rites under the shadow of a holy fane. The craving for worship seeks its appeasement not only in the pure and true, and a past enlightenment does not guarantee it against a present error. In all the ages during which men have walked among the revelations of God, some amongst them "have forsaken the fountain of living waters and hewn out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water." The churches, taught by men who had been with Jesus and had seen "the power of His resurrection," included persons who held the teaching of Balaam, ate things sacrificed to idols, and committed fornication. The present Church of Rome boasts of its unbroken succession from the simple primitive Church, yet the walls of its buildings are often covered with pictures, lights are burned at the shrines of saints, Mary is worshipped more than Jesus, and a frail man is revered as infallible! Where, too, there has been a practical protest against Papal departures from purer worship, who dare to say that no heed is paid to seducing spirits, no "departure from the faith" has occurred? Called Christians, counted among those who profess belief in Jesus, how many have only a name to live! How many use their position to do that which is not seemly! And spiritual worship is made to provide a room for that which is earthly and sensual.

II. It needs a close search to perceive its obliquity. The hole in the wall could excite only suspicion, but an investigation made by the breaking through could expose the corruption which was festering. It is a suggestive omen for those who would discern the times, and learn the judgment of truth respecting them. We must wait and watch in the light which Jesus sheds, follow up the questions which the Holy Spirit may prompt in regard to the meaning of our forms of worship. There are "depths of Satan" into which no sounding-line will be let down without some impulse; there is a hating of the light of which no estimate can be made till the Divine word measures it. The external worship of a church may be associated with for years, and not a fear startle the soul lest there should not be spirit and truth in its observance. The forms may be appropriate; but beneath them there may be no loyalty to the Christ, only a care for personal satisfaction and comfort. The pens may be filled, and filled with anything but sheep! Only He who holds the seven stars in His right hand knows and can reveal the lurking sins which offend Him and hinder the Gospel of His Son. What right-hearted man will not pray, often and expectingly, "Lead me to where I can see, open mine eyes that I may see that which impinges against Thy truth and holiness and love, no matter by whom or by what numbers the evil thing is committed"?

III. It manifests a voracious appetite. Several animals do not satisfy, idols

of other kinds are accepted as objects for worship. As in Jerusalem, so it was in the days of imperial Rome—a niche was provided for the gods of all nations. Corruption spreads by its own nature. One step is not much out of the narrow way, but the line which that step begins to trace will take to far-off regions. The mystery of lawlessness, with its power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness, started on its career from the bosom of apostolic churches; and the warning-note, needed by all seekers for God's will, is, "Be not moved away from the true worship, lest you go from bad to worse, and weary the Lord."

IV. It exercises varied influences. *Over the higher ranks of society.* Their position and their intelligence do not act as a safeguard against a deteriorated religiousness. They are most under the claims of worldly fashion, and a fashion in worship is most likely to be potent amongst them. At any rate, church history may be adduced to show that it is not the common people but the aristocracy of a country from whom a change from a simple to a complex and sensuous ritual finds its chief support. *Over the aged.* The elders of the house of Israel corrupted the statutes of the Lord. The lapse of years brings trial and failures. Men get weary of the God whose command is, "Be ye holy for I am holy," who allows no illegitimate indulgence to the lusts of the flesh and mind, and they go into self-pleasing causes after a lifetime of hearing a voice behind them continually say, "This is the way, walk ye in it." "There is no fool like an old fool!" *Over family associations.* The chief among the abettors of corrupted worship was a man of whom it would have been said, "The influences of his family will prevent him from going amongst the secret worshippers of idols." But this saying is superficial and inconsistent with facts. Our generation has seen not a few out of the families of evangelical Protestants become enthusiastic Roman Catholics or Ritualists—ready to stand among them as leaders. They who should have been barriers against turning out of the way of the Lord go at the head of those who turn from it. They whose experience should have confirmed the younger in truth, encourage them to believe in lies. And this lesson is written clear to view, that subjects of the most religious instruction and the most patriotic procedure will not always be found to obey the will of God. Thus influential is the corruption of true worship.

V. It becomes paramount with its adherents. They overcome all scrupulosity in regard to the Lord's Temple, and prostitute it to their debasing ceremonies. They expend money and time in maintaining them. They at length treat the living and holy God as if He paid no concern to what they did, and, having forsaken Him, speak as if He had forsaken them. They impute to Him an ignorance and a heartlessness which, if they did exist, would utterly disqualify Him from being God. So they are subjected to their own devices; they are filled with their own ways.

How strange it seems to leave the right way for the wrong! How unreasonable and unlikely it looks! But yet how familiar the case is! And it is so because men "did not like to retain God in their knowledge." "They have gone away backward." No eyes but God's can detect the many forms of this apostasy, and point out the hole in the wall of religious profession which leads to abominations within hearts and within churches. His ears alone can catch the meaning of those who serve divers lusts and pleasures, who say virtually, "The Lord seeth us not." "I say unto you, Fear Him."

Chambers of Imagery.

"*Then said He unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? For they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth*" (chap. viii. 12).

A hall of imagery! No phrase could better describe the mind of man, and memory the painter. In colours bright or dark, in the very lineaments of joy or

shame or grief, she paints every struggle of the soul; our very wishes and purposes, though unacted, are all there. We behold all the scenes of the past fixed immovably on the walls and silently smiling or frowning upon us.

What is upon the walls? Some spaces are blank, condemning our profitless days. Some, like the dark catacombs of Rome, have scenes of decay and death portrayed. Here the innocence of childhood is slowly dying; there honesty is bartered away for gain, or virtue for pleasure. It may be there are chambers in which are beheld a virtuous youth, a devout age, a divine faith triumphing over the powers of the world. But at the best there is only a mingled series of pictures. Each soul is a temple, each heart an altar, and often the unhallowed rites of another worship than that of the Lord of heaven are practised there.

We are apt to feel as if what was done in those chambers was unmarked. Darkness and thick walls gave concealment to the ancients of the house of Judah: "The Lord seeth us not." Yet the angels were looking in; and to the prophet, his eyes touched with spiritual light, all became visible.

In our chambers of imagery there may be other witnesses than we think. Surely it is not a vain or unreasonable thought, that round us are spiritual beings to whose spiritual eyes the mind lies open as the scenes of the world lie open to the bodily eye. Happy if we suffer to abide in our mind only those thoughts and purposes which these spiritual beings may gladly look upon!

But if there be no other, there is one eye that looks through all the veils of time and sense. In the sight of God the mind is the seat and source of all good and evil. The purpose clothes the act with its own goodness or guilt. The same act may be disinterested or selfish; the same forms of worship a mockery or a devotion, according to the purpose. In those chambers is the real life of man, and the imaginations we indulge in take shape, and the hopes we cherish are audible prayers before the Lord who seeth, and who has not forsaken the earth.

We may enter those chambers of imagery for correction and improvement. The time comes when we must enter them for judgment. In that dread hour the memory must take a conspicuous part. In the midst of the awful congregation of the risen dead again must we pass through the halls of imagery. The silent walls shall need no voice—memory and conscience shall affirm the righteous judgment of God. For that day, when the strong shall bow and the most devout tremble, may we in mercy be prepared!

Our life is founded on what is past, and every year we live the past becomes more important in its steady influence; we live in the midst of its memorials. It is the home which we build around us day by day, and according to what we make it will there be liberty or imprisonment. Each day let your deeds and your purposes be such that a new picture shall take a place on the walls that you will be glad to see. The past is fixed on the walls, we cannot take it down, but we may correct and alter. The picture of the prodigal's departure has added to it the picture of his return and the father's enduring love. Over scenes of guilt there may be arched the rainbow of the Divine mercy. Repentance may not efface the past, but it transfigures it. While bygone sins remind us of our weakness, they bring us nearer to Him whose strength saves and whose mercy forgives.—*Peabody (abridged).*

Third and fourth abomination (vers. 13–18).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 13, 14. The seer is led from the secret chamber back to the point at which he had first approached to the precincts of the Temple (ver. 3). He stands now at its northern entrance, not at the entrance to the inner court as in the former case, "and, behold, the women weeping for Tammuz were sitting there." Whether they were without or within the Temple walls is not stated, but they were in the attitude of mourners. Jeremiah bears

witness (Jer. vii. 11, xiv. 17) to the activity of women at this period in the service of idolatry, though he does not mention their devotion to Tammuz. Nor is it mentioned anywhere else, and no satisfactory explanation has been given of it. Conjectures are abundant —often wide of the mark. They have too readily accepted this weeping and that of the Syrians, Greeks, &c., for Adonis, or the Egyptians for Osiris, as standing on the same ground. It might be no forceful objection against such comparison to say that the rites in those countries involved rejoicings as well as lamentations, and that they were accompanied with "unbridled license and excess." But surely we may believe that if the women of Jerusalem indulged in the gross orgies common to Adoniac worship, Jeremiah was not the man to have shunned all reference to their wickedness. Whether the "Babylonian legend," deciphered from an ancient tablet, and which tells of "a goddess, *widow* of Duzi, the 'Son of Life,' descending through the seven circles 'of the land of invisibility,' and reascending after various vicissitudes," indicates the quarter from which the weeping for Tammuz was derived, is of no consequence as yet. "The Speaker's Commentary," while mentioning the legend, acknowledges that its purport and its influence are utterly obscure. The habit of the Jewish women, somehow or another, must have demoralized themselves and those related to them, and so was regarded as an "abomination."

Ver 15. The seer had to observe great abominations (ver. 6), then great abominations they were doing (ver. 13), and now greater abominations than these he had already seen. His view had gone from general idol-worship to secret worship among the magnates of Jerusalem, afterwards from open debasement of the women to utter defiance of God in the priestly portion of the Temple. The climax of evil in warfare is reached when the soldiers become rebels, when works of darkness are substituted for the whole attire of light.

Ver. 16. Again Ezekiel is taken further, to a point from which he can inspect the spot "**between the porch and the altar**," a sacred place in the inner court where the priests gathered together apparently only in seasons of extraordinary interest, such as a national fast (Joel ii. 17). On that hallowed ground he saw "**as it were twenty-five men.**" Fairbairn calls them men "of priestly rank, the princes of the sanctuary," and considers the number was made up of the High Priest and the twenty-four heads of the courses of the priests which had been arranged by David. He takes them as representing "the whole priesthood." Is it not better to regard the number, as the Seventy was, as a historical number, and intended to show nothing more than that the priesthood even was not wholly loyal to God? Consecrated for His worship in the place where He had chosen to put His name, they were seen "**with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces to the east, and they worshipped the sun toward the east.**" The worship of the sun, so common in many countries, had already been practised in Judea, and was put down in Josiah's reforming reign (2 Kings xxiii. 5, 11). It was too deeply rooted and too attractive to be overturned by a transient revival of purer worship; and here it is seen to have seduced the guardians of that worship.

Ver. 17. The scenes which had been unfolded in the seer's vision were in palpable contrariety to the worship of the Lord, but the forms of apostasy he had observed were of little account, "**a light thing to the house of Judah:**" they would disregard God if they disregarded the rights of their brethren, "**for they filled the land with violence, and returned,**" *i.e.*, gone back again and again to their evil doings, "**to provoke me to anger, and,**" something especially offensive is singled out for mention, "**lo, they put the branch to their nose.**" The explanations of this obscure phrase, which refer it to a rite of heathen worship in which a branch was carried in the hand, or raised to the mouth, do not agree with the words;

Moreover, the context has left the sphere of religion for that of morals, and would suggest some action not directly religious—at any rate, some very gratuitous evil deed. But there is no tolerable accounting for the words, and the conclusion to which Fairbairn comes seems reasonable: "One would expect the clause to denote something that rendered their sinful ways peculiarly obnoxious to God, and nothing would more readily do this than feelings of fancied security and insolent scorn." So he surmises that it must have reference to some insulting kind of proceedings. The result would be a correspondence between their conduct and the position which the Lord was driven to take—urgent prayers but no reply (ver. 18). "I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity" (Jer. xviii. 17).

HOMILETICS.

Emotional Worship (ver. 14).

This abomination in worship is not described by Ezekiel, as it has been by many interpreters, as gross and licentious. And though, probably, it deserved such epithets, yet the one term which he employs, "weeping," suggests a course that leads far from holiness and love. We see the dominance of the emotions in worship—

I. **In sensuous procedure.** Weeping at one time, shouting at another, processions and extravagant gestures, are specimens of the actions to which the indulged emotions prompt. That those manifestations might appear when any feeling is casually and strongly moved need not surprise; but that they should be made a regular part of the service throws doubt on their genuineness, and brands them as unworthy of the God who is Spirit and Truth. If the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets, why should not the emotions also be?

II. **In the persons chiefly affected.** More readily than men, women are stirred on the emotional side of their nature. Let that side be controlled so as to stand in due proportion to the other sides, and it will help to fill worship with the tone befitting One who is loved for His love. But when it is unduly fostered, when it is fascinated to extravagant assertion of itself, a deteriorating effect must follow. For then the influence of womanly emotion, which should keep clear our family life and purify it when muddied, not only loses its efficacy, but tends to render it turbid and malarious. Women stand in a perilous position when they allow free scope to their emotions in worship. They make it an offence to God, however devoted and continuous it may be.

III. **In a wrong estimate of the objects.** Legends which have no truth, or so scanty an item of it that prehistoric studies and mythological suggestions are needed to find it; imaginary evils; a morbid craving for some excitement to break into the idleness of life, or into the trials which seek for the relief of change, these "beguile women of her tears," and draw into sentimental and fantastic expressions of devotion. True, the gross aspects of emotional worship may be little manifested in modern Christendom; but emotions still count for something in worship; and we do well to remind ourselves that however deeply we feel awe in what are called sacred or holy places, however moved by a dim religious light or music, by prayer or pathetic preaching, that the worship engendered from such feelings does no more in the perfect will of God than idol images or clouds of incense. We need truth to originate and regulate emotions.

"Let Christian women, instead of wasting in sickly and carnal sentimentality the tender and susceptible natures which God has given them, weep with them that weep, heal the bruises of the suffering members of the Church, and minister to those who need temporal or spiritual help. Let them, instead of weeping over fictitious tales of morbid love and carnal sorrows, consecrate their fine sensibilities

to the active promotion of the glory of Him who is altogether lovely, and whose bitter sufferings for us should call forth our tears of gratitude and glowing love. Let them try to resemble Mary, who, in her devotion, when all others were gone, stood at the sepulchre of her crucified Lord weeping, and so had her tears dried up by the risen Saviour Himself."—*Fausset.*

Wilful Worship (ver. 16).

All forms of worship are not equally dishonouring to the only Lord. However foolish, corrupted, or exaggerated some of them may be, the climax in evil is assigned to that which springs from the determination of men to turn their backs upon Him who has revealed Himself to them. Their worship is—

I. **Against knowledge.** The spot at which the twenty-five men carried on their worship indicated a priestly office. Of that office it was said, "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." But here were men disowning their highest functions, doing despite to the law they were appointed to observe, who "loved darkness rather than the light," and fell under the condemnation passed upon those who forsake their own mercies. It is hard on a father that he should be disobeyed by his child, and the hardest point of such disobedience is when it is done notwithstanding clear knowledge of his commands.

II. **In desecration of the temple.** Sun-worship would have been sinful anywhere; this had its aggravation in that it was conducted in the place where God's honour dwelt. They provoked Him to His face. They deliberately polluted with their abominations that which He ordained to be holy. And though there be no such sacred place now, yet may we learn that if we take our self-pleasings in where we and others worship, we erect barriers between us and our Lord. We sin against Him and sin against our brethren.

III. **In preference of the creature to the Creator.** The altar was the spot on which God received the signs of homage due to Him. They turned their backs on it and insulted Him by rendering homage to the sun. The east was more to them than the threat or the promise of the God of their fathers; the seen more reverenced than the unseen; a dead object chosen rather than the living God. Thus they were guilty of treason, and under the awful ban of those who are without excuse! Alas! a similar procedure may be found still under the shadow of the Cross. "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth"—how could professing Christians regard these words as true if it were not for sad examples to illustrate them? How many preach for self or the world! How many enter into places of worship rather to be considered respectable, to please a patron, to acknowledge an unknown God, than to "rejoice in God through Jesus Christ the Lord!" Surely we all need to try our ways in worship, to realise the Light which is ever searching our services, not that it may find fault, but that it may show our faults, so that we shall repent of our errors and form a pure and steadfast regard to the Lord alone. Then, when we cease from the creature, we shall worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, seeking not our own glory, but the glory of Him who is greatly to be feared and had in reverence.

Religion and Morality (ver. 17).

The "abominations" were meant to make a deep impression upon the seer as to the religious condition of his people in their own metropolis. But more was to be observed. The evils which were seen in the Temple were surpassed throughout the land; and he is asked to institute a comparison between worship and conduct, religion and morality. Among the elements which bring religion and morality into comparison are these—

I. **They are distinguished from each other.** Religion has reference to visible and invisible objects in which some kind of force is supposed to reside, and which are rarely men. When they are human beings, real or imaginary, they have ascribed to them certain attributes which separate them from ordinary men. Morality has reference to the men whom we think of, speak to, act with or on. This distinction, however, does not imply separation of the two spheres.

II. **They are intimately associated.** Religion and morality may be separated in thought; they cannot be in practice. This is not to be understood to say that a religious man cannot exist without some kind of moral conduct, or a moral man without some friendly or unfriendly attitude towards religion. It is to say that a man's religious sentiments have always some influence upon his social actions, even if image or sun worship could be shown never to have let their rill of religious thought flow into the stream of moral requirements. It may be that a man who worships an idol, or says there is no God, is irreproachable in his morals. Allowing that there might be no question as to the reality of individual cases, yet are they rare. They are exceptions to the general rule that a high morality depends upon a true religion. This is manifest where the God of Israel, the only true God, is served or disobeyed. His religion is inextricably mingled up with morality. Whosoever gives due honour to the Lord God accepts every moral obligation. The love of God and the righteousness of God produce love and rectitude in all relations. And should it be said that His professed worshippers are often unfaithful, dishonourable, impure, self-seeking in regard to man, it can be replied that such persons do not possess the religion pure and undefiled before God and the Father. If they went out from it, they were not of it. They never knew Jesus the Holy One or His Father. They swell the instances which show that an irreligious class or nation must be, on the whole, immoral—a moral class or nation, on the whole, religious.

III. **They are unfairly estimated.** The bearing of the question put to the prophet defines not only a set of opinions which held that it was not an evil thing to resort to idol-worship, but also that it was even a lighter evil to commit flagrant injustice towards each other. Both religion and morality were under-estimated; and such a course implied that if a man kept up forms of worship, he might be a tyrant, a cheat, or seducer, and be at ease! Against the notion that morality is of less consequence than religion, this appeal to Ezekiel takes an unfaltering stand. It signifies that men who supposed that acts of worship allowed them liberty to set at nought the rights of the poor and needy provoked the Lord deeply. It signifies that by the former course they had put God far away, had removed the great restraint against wrong-doings, and in the latter sent violent dealings into every circle of social life in which they could press their selfish interest. It signifies that men who were more careful to pay their idolatrous worship than to do justly and love mercy were preparing for themselves a fearful doom. Whether religion is to be more highly valued than morality is a vain question. The doctrine of God our Saviour insists on their interfusion as parts of doing His will. When sects, churches, societies, speak lightly of a man's bad conduct because he is a recognised member; when it is judged more expedient to bend the head or knees, to wave incense, to weep over fancies or pictures, to say the words of a creed, to make reverence towards the east, to have a form of godliness, than it is to keep evil thoughts down, or to do fairly to every man, or to live unspotted from the world; when there is an attempt to palliate covetousness, misrepresentations, unkindness, on the ground that they belong to the reign of "mere morality"—then the standard of God must be lifted up, "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor railers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God." On the other hand, when it is maintained that religion is of no force to form a moral life; when palliation is made for worldly and unrighteous conduct on the ground that the doers make no profession of faith

in the Christian's God, then we must affirm that the religion of Christ is a religion of righteousness, and that they who make light of Him will go on in darkness, and so will reap the fruit of their own ways.

(2.) The Judgment upon the Inhabitants of Jerusalem (Chap. ix.)

1. *The guards of the city and their work* (vers. 1–7).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—This chapter is closely connected with the preceding, and carries expressly the threatening of ver. 18 into immediate action. Ministers of the Lord, waiting on Him, are summoned to execute His purposes.

Ver. 1. The prophet is made a hearer of the summons. "**And He called in mine ears with a loud voice;**" the mode of speaking is a copy of that in viii. 18. There is a sense in which God treats men as they treat Him: "As I cried and they would not hear, so they cried and I would not hear." Moreover, the minute details as to the ears and pitch of voice are significant of the realistic character of the vision. It was not a marvellous but shadowy experience through which Ezekiel was passing. He accents the fact that the smallest as the greatest items were well defined; while the loudness of the voice is a token both of the strong emotion of the Lord and the importance to be attached to the events about to happen. "**Saying, Come near, ye that have charge of the city.**" The phrase, *ye that have charge*, is a translation of a Hebrew word rendered elsewhere *office*, *visitation*, *oversight*, and those holding office, *officers* (Isa. lx. 17). Accepting this last rendering as applicable here, we have to think of overseers, watchers, guards (Dan. iv. 13, x. 20), who attend to the execution of the sentences of God. They were armed, "**each man with his instrument of destruction in his hand.**" "No common earthly weapon is suitable to the hands of such an host."—*Haev.*

Ver. 2. At the summons, "**six men came**" from the same quarter as the glory (chap. i. 4), and from which the earthly armies were to proceed as instruments of the heavenly powers. The weapon of each is named differently from the name in ver. 1; here it is "**an instrument of demolition.**" Interpretation of the number six—parts of the city, military Chaldean divisions, &c.—is superfluous. It is immediately shown that the number of watchers was the sacred, perfect number. "**And one man in their midst clothed with linen.**" He was not one of the six, but a seventh man and superior to the others. They go after him; he marks before they strike (ver. 5). The material which clothes him is like that of the various parts of the high priest's dress (Lev. xvi. 4), and is supposed by many to signify that this seventh man had a high-priestly function. This is doubtful, and all that we need ascribe to the texture of his garments is that it represented a heavenly messenger of the Lord specially commissioned. So it is set forth in Daniel (x. 5 and xii. 6), and it may be that the idea symbolised by linen had by this time attributed to it a wider application, preparing for that universal application which the New Testament ratifies. "The armies which are in heaven followed, clothed in fine linen, white and pure." "It was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure." The seventh had not a destroying weapon: he is to carry out another procedure besides that of slaughter; so he had "**an inkhorn upon his loins.**" "It is still customary in the East to wear the inkhorn in the girdle. Scribes wear them constantly in their girdles, and ministers of state wear them in the same manner, as symbols of their office."—*Kitto.* The purport of these writing materials is, in accordance with the custom of registering the names of the Israelites in public rolls, that he may write certain names in the book of life—the names of those on whom he is to place a mark. Who is this distin-

guished watcher? "In Dan. x. 5 we have the appearance of a man *clothed in linen*, who is manifestly the same as He whom John describes as *the Son of man clothed with a garment down to his feet* (Rev. i. 13). This *One man*, then, was the *angel of the covenant*, the great High Priest, superior to those by whom He was surrounded, receiving direct communication from the Lord, taking the coals of vengeance from between the cherubim (x. 2), but coming with mercy to the contrite as well as with vengeance to the impenitent; who *took upon Him the form of a man* . . . who *came to send fire upon the earth*, but *also to call sinners to repentance;* who shall *lose none of those whom the Father hath given Him.*"—*Speaker's Com.* "**And they came and stood beside the brazen altar;**" they were waiting in reverence and readiness in the very spot where sin had reached its worst form (viii. 16), to fulfil that which would be commanded.

It is by no means to be understood "that there is a band of seven angels whose special vocation it is to be the watchmen and guardians of Jerusalem. For the *number seven* is here, as elsewhere in the Old Testament, the sign that a divine operation is being completed—in this passage the divine judgment, now advancing to its close—and there is no necessity for having recourse to the seven planet gods of the Babylonians, &c. . . . The seventh angel, of special dignity, corresponds to the horseman who, in the vision of Zech. i. 8, stands among the myrtle trees which symbolise the covenant people, and is evidently the chief over those who run to and fro through the earth. It is very remarkable that, as Baumgarten very justly observes, this angel, in whom is the name of Jehovah, withdraws from the history of revelation so long as Israel is under a visible ruler of the house of David; but now, when this visible rule is abrogated, an invisible Ruler again appears, and attains a more concrete form, combined with personal agency, though at the same time hypostatically distinguished from God."—*Oehler.*

Ver. 3. An ominous symbol appears. "**And the glory of the God of Israel rose up from the cherub upon which it was.**" The cherub, corresponding to living creature (chap. i. 20), is used for cherubim. These forms over the mercy-seat constituted the throne of the glory, the place where His honour dwelt; but the Temple having been made a scene on which His glory was given to idols, He retires "**to the threshold.**" He rises up to scatter His enemies, and at the place of egress from the Temple to open ground, He issues His commands for the seven guards in reference to His sentences on the people.

Ver. 4. A command is given to the leader, so that mercy should precede judgment. "**And the Lord said to him, Go through the midst of the city . . . and mark a mark.**" Such a marking, as a religious and separating sign, has been customary in various countries, and is especially conspicuous upon the foreheads of the Hindus. The mark may be an honour or a dishonour, according as it separates for the living God or from God. Here it is a token of the former. The word translated "mark" is the name-word of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *tau*. The oldest form of this letter is said to be that of a cross, T; and from this statement sundry of the fathers and others have drawn, very unnecessarily, recondite meanings and pious conclusions. That the mark would be a definite one is obvious—how else could the six smiters know whom to pass by?—but what its shape was who can specify? It was "not a mark to be actually imprinted and seen upon their persons, but was an indication of the place they held in the watchful oversight and directing agency of God."—*Fairbairn.* "**upon the foreheads of the men;**" there it would be distinctly seen and betoken the character before God. It separated from the mass of the people. In Egypt a mark of blood was made on the doorposts of the Israelites—their deliverance was that of families; here the mark was on the forehead—the salvation is that of individuals. The difference is one of the proofs, which Ezekiel elsewhere incidentally presents, that a new principle of God's dealings was on the way to establishment. The

individual and not the nation was to be the point of His operations in the latter days. In relation to this "mark," the "Speaker's Commentary" says, "The sign of the cross in baptism is an outward sign of the designation of God's elect, who at the last day shall be exempted from the destruction of the ungodly (Matt. xxiv. 22, 31)." Patristic legends are apparently not yet extinct! How different from this inept comment is that which Keil gives, though he translates *tau* by cross: "There is something remarkable in this coincidence to the thoughtful observer of the ways of God, whose counsel has carefully considered all beforehand, especially when we bear in mind that, in the counterpart to this passage (Rev. vii. 3), the seal of the living God is stamped upon the foreheads of the servants of God who are to be exempted from the judgment, and that according to Rev. xiv. 1, they had the name of God written upon their foreheads." Very different indeed from "the sign of the cross!" "**that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof.**" This is the criterion by which the writer will know those whom he has to mark. In secret and in public they grieve over the evils which are rife in the land.

Vers. 5, 6. A command is given to the six, "**Go in the city after him and smite,**" so as to make an utter end, sparing neither age nor sex. One special exception is made. No other class is recognised but two. In a testing time like this there is no possibility of holding the place of neutrals; "**and every man upon whom is the mark touch not;**" their tears, and words of prayer and reproof because of sin, show that they are on the Lord's side. He is pledged to preserve His own; "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye." There is here no guarantee against all kinds of sorrow and sufferings. Lot is rescued from Sodom, but he has to incur loss and the pain of dissevered family ties. Jeremiah had to pass through deep waters of affliction during the period in which **the six** watchers were cutting down the unworthy. The exemption of the marked ones must be considered as referring only to direct strokes of punishment. "The marking secures not against any share in the divine judgments; this would not correspond with the nature of the divine righteousness, as even the elect are in many ways affected with the prevailing corruption (comp. Isa. vi. 5): it secures only against being swept away with the wicked, against an evil death, and all that would stand in contradiction with the rule, 'that all things work together for good to them that love God.'"—*Hengstenberg.* "**and begin at my sanctuary,**" in it the abominations had found their normal expression. The head and front of the offence against the holy God was exhibited there. It had lost the reality and must be deprived of the semblance of holiness. The watchers inflict their first strokes in it and beat down the men who stood with backs to the altar while worshipping the creature; "**they began with the men, the elders who were before the house;**" they were not called elders (chap. viii. 16), but their representative position may suggest that they were so; and "before the house" will refer not to the whole Temple, but to that portion which constituted its germ, as seems intimated in what follows.

Ver. 7. "**And He said unto them, Defile the house,**" by the bodies of the slain. If to touch a corpse and to worship without being sprinkled with the water of separation was to defile the tabernacle of the Lord (Num. xix. 13), much more would blood and corpses do so. But the execution of judgment was to extend beyond the inner place where the altar stood: "**and fill the courts with slain.**" Scarcely is the edict issued when it is obeyed, and the further order is added, "**go forth.**" "The expression has the air of military abruptness," and despatches at once from the desecrated temple: "**and they went forth and slew in the city.**"

HOMILETICS.

Features of Divine Disciplinary Government.

Over all the conditions in which persons or peoples act their parts God is King and Judge. Whether they worship Him or pay adoration to created things, whether they act in brotherliness or selfishness, He tests their character and passes sentences from which they may learn to do righteousness and hate iniquity. That they do not always learn is no more a proof against the discipline of God, than the belief of numberless men that the sun moves round the earth is a proof against the science of the works of God. And just as in the case of astronomy, He "waited six thousand years for an observer," and, even since Kepler lived, myriads have not known the real position of the sun; so in the case of moral discipline, He has been giving here a little and there a little, and still His moral government is unrecognised by multitudes who are subjected to it. He is in no hurry on this account. He waits with patience, teaching as He waits and giving indications of the modes in which He deals with moral beings, as in this manifestation before Ezekiel.

I. Divine moral discipline involves the action of latent forces. *Such forces exist.* The seer is not aware of the contiguousness of the guards of the city. They are not within the field of his sight before the call to them is uttered. What they are, where they are, how they will act when they appear, are questions which can be answered only by the event. There are forces suitable for disciplinary ends in air, or earth, or sea, or the regions beyond, and the Lord can make them attend to His word. Storms, earthquakes, epidemics, armies may be poured forth, as soldiers from a fortress, to ravage a land and its people, and they will come from any quarter in which their germs have been stored, and will spread under the direction of spiritual powers who obey the God of glory. At the due moment He will summon them though He may have long time holden His peace.

They are multifold. At one time fiery flying serpents destroy the wandering Israelites and the plague at another. David is required to make choice of one out of three punishments for his sin in numbering the people. Ezekiel sees six men preparing to visit the city, and a seventh in their midst having another duty than theirs to fulfil in it. One angel may minister to the suffering Jesus, but He could have twelve legions of them for the asking. We are open at every pore to the action of the Lord who has made us, and He has a messenger in some occult garrison who is fitted to enter into the pore He would affect us by. Almightiness calls just the kind and number needed to execute His will. There is never one too few or one too many.

They wait at command. The seven watchers of the city appeared from out their concealment and stood beside the brazen altar. They are ready to receive and to execute the orders of Him to whose honour the sacrifices offered on the altar were to be consecrated. And when such divine forces operate, no interven tion can prevent the mark of approbation which the Lord would give to His faithful friends from being impressed on them, as no shield is broad enough and strong enough to ward off the penalty which a course of rebellion ensures to those who forget God. You are secure if you have the mind that was in Christ Jesus; you are exposed to incalculable anguish if you make light of Him and go *your* way.

They are varied in capability. The weapons and the inkhorn are emblems of the differing influences which condemn and praise human thoughts and conduct. There are numberless producers of suffering to mankind. Onlookers cannot tell whether the trouble causing sin is to be ascribed to the sufferers or their parents; but no believer in a righteous Father can doubt that every suffering is due. It is

a just measure, in view of what men need, that they may learn there is a holy God. Influences, moreover, proceed from appeals to the mind. Books and letters, sermons and conversations, have induced many souls to grieve over sin and to long for the grace of God—have brought many into shame and also into peace. Who can imagine the various features of God's action upon men? Who can tell from whence that action will proceed? It is our comfort to know that He has sovereign authority everywhere; that no influence acts casually, but each one in due subordination to Him; that the upshot of all the summonses He sends forth will be to prove that He is holy, and just, and good; and that men have been treated with the end of saving them from sin and making them partakers of His holiness.

II. It grounds its procedure upon marked differences in human character. In God's moral discipline precedence is given to His saving will. The man clothed in linen first made the mark of deliverance from death, and then the other six followed with the blows of their fatal weapons. The righteous are not treated as the wicked. Mercy is honoured before judgment is executed.

Safety is apportioned to those who are of one heart with God. They are seen to be loyal to His rule. They hate what He hates. They deplore the abominations which cast a slur upon the Holy One of Israel. They are seen to have sympathy for men. They do not neglect, despise, denounce the unworthy lives of their fellow-citizens: they grieve deeply because of them, knowing their own natural feebleness in the assaults of temptations; they dare not assume the airs of them that are at ease and the contempt of those that are proud. At the same time they profess no maudlin charity, and so excuse the sins which are openly committed or secretly practised in chambers of imagery. It may be that they are comparatively few—six men to punish and one only to seal with the mark of safety—but they are not ruled by the popular fashions. They are to serve God and not men. Their love to God teaches them to love their brother also, and they are conformed to the image of Him who, on a later day, wept over Jerusalem. This was the character which secured the sealing on the forehead—this the kind of character which has the sealing of the Holy Spirit of promise. For the mark is not what they see, but rather what others see on them. It is not some suggestion which they suppose is made to themselves, however vivid that suggestion may seem to be. That is no valid assurance of our being sons of God. Our assurance must come, not from an inward suggestion, but from proof, evidence, witness, which is of the nature of a work of the Spirit on the soul. What more effectual, as such a testimony, than a character which exhibits loyalty to God and sympathy for sinners? which is like that of Christ Jesus? "This is the highest sort of witness which it is possible the soul should be the subject of: if there were any such thing as a witness of the Spirit by immediate suggestion or revelation, this would be vastly more noble and excellent, and as much above that as the heaven is above the earth."—*Edwards.* We who hear the Gospel may truly understand that the sealer to our safety is the Son, to whom all judgment is committed; whom the armies of heaven follow; who has all power in heaven and in earth. He knows His sheep by name. His care for them is the care of prayer and self-sacrifice. He does not go into churches and mark crowds by water of baptism. He does not pass over one house and into another so that He may mark a household on their foreheads. He acts upon individuals and on their hearts. He washes away their sins by His own blood. He renews their wills. He induces them to follow His example. And because they are quickened by His Spirit and walk in newness of life, He secures them, and they shall never perish. Christ does not guarantee His followers against all tribulation, but He does their safety from destruction by calamity. The Chaldeans might cause distress to, but could not slay, the sorrowing citizens. The enticements of sinful lusts may harass you again and again; disease may keep you bodily and spiritually low; you may be bereaved of friends whom you greatly miss; you may be injured by the conduct of those with whom you come into association; your

sighs and tears may be apparently fruitless; you may see the evils still in full force around you as if you never had prayed, never had stood up for God against the workers of iniquity; yet the mighty power of God preserves you, and the time will come when you will be removed from the furnace purified like gold, and you will receive the crown of righteousness which fadeth not away. "The divine faithfulness still abides sure to the true children of the covenant. . . . Let such, therefore, trust in the Lord at all times, and fear not that it shall be well with the righteous."—*Fairbairn.*

Death is appointed to those who continue in trespasses. The Lord has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but rather that he turn from his wicked way. Only, if he will not turn, what remains? He is dead in sins, and a worse fate there cannot be. The guilt of it should produce unbounded fear, and be a signal to arise from the dead that Christ may give light. Let all attempts directed by a merciful God have failed to rouse, then the heavy judgment must fall on the head of every one thus guilty of hardening their hearts against the Lord. No *place* is so sacred as to prevent the execution of the sentence. Let it be temple or church, called holy or sacred, sin is damnation anywhere. The waters of wrath shall sweep into all hiding-places. The very place in which sin is committed may be the place for punishing sin. No *leader* is so great as to have immunity from the sentence. "The more aged and venerable portion of the worshippers, and those who might naturally be regarded as occupying the foremost rank among the people at large," were slain with impartial severity. They whose Godward privileges are greatest, when they defile His worship, incur the penalty of those who are chief in wickedness. "So far is the possession of means of grace from saving men from wrath, that He abhors sin most in those from whom, by reason of their spiritual opportunities, most good was to have been expected."—*Fausset.* As formerly, so now, the appeal is to be seriously listened to, "Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish." God rules in righteousness.

Mourning for Other Men's Sins (ver. 4).

Lamenting the sins of the times and places wherein we live is—

I. A duty incumbent on us. Our affections of grief and anger cannot be better employed than for the interest, nor better bestowed than for the service, of Him who implanted those passions in us. Our natural motions should be ordered for the God of nature, and spiritual ordered for the God of grace. (1.) This was the practice of believers in all ages. (2.) It was our Saviour's practice. (3.) Angels, as far as they are capable, have their grief for the sins of men.

II. It is an acceptable duty to God. (1.) It is a fulfilling of the whole law consisting of love to God and love to our neighbours. (2.) It is an imitating return for God's affection. (3.) This temper justifies God and His justice. (4.) It is a sign of such a temper God hath evidenced Himself in Scripture much affected with. It is both our duty and God's pleasure.

III. It is a means of preservation from public judgments. (1.) Sincerity escapes best in common judgments, and this mourning for public sins is its greatest note. (2.) This frame clears us from the guilt of common sins. (3.) It is an endeavour to repair the honour God has lost. (4.) Mourners in Zion are humble, and humility is preventive of judgments. (5.) They keep covenant with God; and (6.) fear His judgments, which is a means of preventing them.

1. We may be *reproved* if we make sport of sin; if we use mere invectives against it; if we look on it rather as a hurt to ourselves than as injury to God; if we do not truly mourn for our own sins.

2. We may be *comforted.* God doth not strike at random, and they who are stamped with Christ's mark have His wisdom to guard them against folly, His

power against weakness, the Everlasting Father against man, whose breath is in his nostrils.

The Lord seems to be upon the threshold of the temple, come down already from the cherubim, and is it not time to bewail our own sins and the common abominations that have so polluted the place of His habitation? Doth not the Holy Spirit grieve for the sins of those who play the wantons with the grace of God (Eph. iv. 30)? Shall we refuse mourning for that which goes to the heart of the Holy Ghost? Let us sorrow for the sins of the time and place in which we live.—*Charnock.*

The Mark of Deliverance (vers. 4–6).

When God visits the world, or any part of it, with His desolating judgments, He usually sets a mark of deliverance on such as are suitably affected with the sins of their fellow-creatures.

I. What is implied in being suitably affected with the sins of our fellow-creatures? If our fellow-creatures infringe none of our real or supposed rights, and abstain from such gross vices as evidently disturb the peace of society, we usually feel little concern respecting their sins against God. Our nearest neighbours may be of a character remote from that of a Christian, and we show no uneasiness respecting their dangerous condition. There may indeed be a kind of pleasure when we contrast their vices and our virtues, and we are encouraged to hope for impunity in sin. Nor is this surprising. We naturally think little of our own souls or of our own sins, and he who takes no care to save himself is not likely to feel concern for the salvation of others. Evidently a great change must take place in our views and feelings if the conduct of the persons mentioned in our text is suitable for us. Though they lived in an evil day, when the judgments of God were falling heavily upon their nation, they appear to have felt more poignant grief for prevailing sins than for the desolating judgments which they occasioned. To be rightly affected—

First, We must fear sin more than the punishment of sin; be more grieved to see God dishonoured, His Son neglected, and immortal souls ruined, than to see our commerce interrupted, our fellow-citizens divided, and our country invaded.

Second, We must use diligent exertions, by every means in our power, to reform the sinners. There are many who will readily allow that sins prevail among us, and confess it is a very melancholy thing, but still they use no means to counteract or repress the evils which they profess to lament. As it is not sufficient to confess our own sins without renouncing them, so it is not sufficient to mourn for the sins of others without attempting their reformation. This attempt must be made—

1. *By example.* As the force of example is inconceivably great, every person is sacredly bound, in times of prevailing degeneracy, to act an open, firm, and decided part in favour of virtue and religion—avoiding the very appearance of those evils which are prevalent around him.

2. *By exertions to suppress vice and impiety.* When the interests of virtue and religion are fenced round by wholesome laws, every individual is bound to see them faithfully executed. By conniving at the sins of others we make them our own. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." A righteous God will not hold us guiltless if we do not prevent evil which we could have prevented. "If thou forbear to deliver," &c. Those who neither fear God nor regard man must be taught by their apprehensions not to stalk their vicious propensities in open day. The task may be disagreeable. Many will mourn in their closets, but use no exertion in public, pretending that others may more properly engage in it. We are willing that God should take care of our honour and interests, but too often we suffer His laws to be violated with impunity. We

can thus have no claim to the character mentioned in our text. God will set no mark on us unless we appear openly and decidedly against the prevalence of sin.

3. *By prayers.* A regard to order or some similar principle induces to the suppression of vice; but this is presumptuous and tempting God if we neglect prayer for divine influence.

Third, We must be deeply affected with our own sins. We shall acknowledge that our sins have assisted in forming the mass of national guilt. If not guilty of the same vice as others, it is because of the restraints of grace, and we shall temper all exertions with pity for the offender while abhorring the offence. He who is most affected by the sins of others will mourn most sincerely for his own. Thus have all the good men mentioned in the Bible done.

II. That on such as are thus affected God will set a mark of deliverance when those around them are destroyed by His desolating judgments. This is inferred—

1. *From the justice of God.* They do not share in the national sins; they mourn for and oppose them, and justice requires a mark of separation for them. True, such persons have violated the law of God as individuals; but they have not done the wickedness which is chargeable on the community, and they are spared.

2. *From God's holiness.* Such characters love God. It is their love to God which causes them to mourn over and oppose iniquity. His cause, His honour, they consider as their own. While God loves holiness He cannot but love them.

3. *From His faithfulness.* None more highly honour Him than those who appear openly on His side in opposition to sin, and He will honour them by placing some mark of distinction on them. Like their Father and their Redeemer they are grieved with the sins of man, and a strong refuge is provided by Him.

4. *From the facts of Scripture.* Noah, Job, Elijah, Jeremiah, &c. Will it be said that facts do not always justify the statement of deliverance? We allow that they do not. But may the professed mourners not partake in common sin, or be entangled in policy so as not to bear a testimony against the prevailing evil? And if many righteous have been put to death, the mark of God was on them. Stephen, Paul, and Silas, martyrs. However this may be, the Son of God, clothed in the linen garments of His priestly office, has sprinkled them with His blood, sealed them with the Holy Spirit, written their names in the book of life, and they will have His Father's name written in their forehead.

If God should send a messenger to set a mark on all who are suitably affected, would it appear on thee?—*Payson* (*abridged*).

2. *The Prophet Interceding in Vain* (vers. 8–11).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 8. Ezekiel recovers from a passing surprise while the slaughter in the city was proceeding, and then realises his solitariness. "And remained I," the frequenters of the Temple all dead, the only one spared alive there, his perturbed mind was found in a temporary oblivion of what he had heard in reference to such as were to be marked, and then loomed before him the obliteration even of the promised remnant. In intense sympathy for the people; in fear and sorrow, "I fell upon my face;" with his mouth in the dust he burst forth into an appeal for forbearance—speaking not in name of the exiles, but in name of the inhabitants of Judea, "and said, Ah! Lord God, destroyest Thou all the remnant of Israel," as would be done, "in the pouring out Thy fury upon Jerusalem?" The captive sin Assyria and Babylon are undergoing their punishment: all that is left of Israel as a nation is here, and therefore Ezekiel's cry is to the Lord God for the latter.

Ver. 9. The answer to his appeal is

decisive. "**And He said unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is great exceedingly.**" The criminality was not all of the same character: in the landward parts, crimes of "**blood-shedding**" were most common; in the city, crimes of "**perverting rights.**" Religious declension and rebelliousness are not mentioned here, but moral corruption is, as constituting the evil which is to be severely punished. And the terms in which the people form an excuse for their sins correspond with the predominance of the moral element: "**for they say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not.**" The difference between this and that in chap. viii. 12, where the religious aspect was prominent, lies here: the latter verse puts "seeth us not" first—religion is primarily a matter between God and man. The verse now before us puts "hath forsaken the earth" first—as if the Lord had gone away from all regard of the conduct of men to men. They imagine they have free scope to act as they choose towards each other, no one is taking oversight of them. "The source of all transgression is denial of the providence of God."

Ver. 10. The people had taken the position that they only had rights, and yet that position is commanded by another. "**And I also, my eye shall not spare . . . their way I put** (*give*) **upon their head.**" The path of life which they are walking on turns up to smite their head with punishment. Ezekiel's appealing question is not directly answered. The Lord "merely vindicates His justice by showing that, whatever amount of vengeance He might inflict, it did not exceed their sin. He would have us humbly acquiesce in His judgments, and wait and trust" (*Fausset*). The prophet sees that a people laden with iniquity go to meet their doom, and he makes no further cry for consideration of their case.

Ver. 11. Scarcely had the answer of the Lord been received when "**behold the man clothed in linen,**" the chief of the guardians of the city, appearing by himself seemingly, "**brought word, saying, I have done as Thou hast commanded me.**" The marks have been affixed on as many as and in the manner in which he had been commissioned. Probably the other six were still carrying on their work (chap. xi. 13). "**The counsel of the Lord, it shall stand.**"

HOMILETICS.

Unsatisfied Prayers (vers. 8–11).

When God spares His servants at a time during which calamity overtakes others, or saves them when many go on in the broad way to destruction, they deeply grieve and earnestly pray for those who are thus overtaken. What they ask for seems not to be assured. They have prayed and wept in vain, they suppose, and a sore heart-trouble is produced. They wonder if the Lord has shut up His compassions; if prayer is nothing but a cry. They doubt if they have prayed aright; if they have misconceived the ways of the Lord. To such questions Ezekiel's case here may suggest direction and solace about unsatisfied prayers.

I. **Such prayers may come from true sympathy with misery.** Men, who have learned to love their fellowmen because of love to their Father, do not take precautions merely for their own safety in the face of impending suffering. If they are secure themselves they cannot be at ease while their neighbours are in danger of being swept away as with a flood. The sins, sorrows, deaths of others cast a heavy burden upon their souls, and they bow down in utter self-abandonment before God to beseech Him to take pity on the impenitent and doomed. They place themselves between the living One and the condemned to death, and put forth the energies which love can command into their supplications. They weep with them that need to be wept for.

II. **Such prayers may use the most effective grounds of appeal.** *They appeal*

to God as God. "Ah, Lord God!" They have no cure in such need. They can help only by prayers, and they present them to Him who hears prayer as to Him who alone is able to do what they long for. In weakness and in conscious self-unworthiness they come boldly to the throne of grace and plead, "Wilt Thou act in such severity, Thou who hast made us and fashioned us, and who knowest our frame? Wilt Thou forget the work of Thine own hands and let it perish? Wilt Thou not show thyself to be the Lord mighty to save?" *They appeal to His promises.* "Israel,"—that was a name to touch the heart of God. For He had chosen the people, had nourished and brought them up as children, and in them meant to bless all the families of the earth. Were, then, all to be cut off—men women, and children? The remnant, to which so much has been pledged, would it too be discarded? Would He thus suffer His faithfulness and truth to fail? *They appeal to His interests.* "Jerusalem,"—those who have stood in the area of His manifested glory, who have been hearers of His word, who are the chief representatives of His people in covenant, who seem best adapted to maintain His way upon earth,—if they are sent down to darkness and death, where will He find a people to show forth His praise and saving health? His nature, His truth, His kingdom are grounds of prayer in which man's selfish pleas have no part. "Do not disgrace the throne of Thy glory!"

III. Such prayers may be presented in submissiveness. "I fell upon my face." God's ways are beyond even a prophet's comprehension. They trend too high and also too deep for us. We are disposed to count that to be confused which is only farther off than we can define, or to charge that with hardness which is only covered with a thin crust. Thus when deprecating the sufferings which befall our persons, our churches, the nations, we may take to questioning God, if not dictating to Him, Wilt Thou not take other steps? Wilt Thou not have regard to the prayers of the destitute? Wilt Thou not have respect to Thy great name whose glory is dearer to Thee than it can be to us? We are but of "yesterday and know nothing."

IV. And such prayers may be based on misconceptions of God. *As to His mercy.* Sympathising friends think they would show pity, they would spare, when God does not, and their tendency is to count Him severe. This conclusion is unreasonable. When once we grasp the idea that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, we learn that they do not take in all the elements involved in divine mercy who surmise that the mercy of God is limited to the surveys of sense. We must rise beyond the range of the earthly for an ampler view of His rule. For Him, as righteous ruler, to spare those who reject His authority, who will not turn to Him in spite of all His endeavours, would be to connive at His own eternal dishonour. They would go on adding sin to sin. They would produce influences which would shake the loyalty of those who had been faithful to Him. There could be no mercy in a course which would cause such results.

As to His patience. We would have Him check the process of degeneracy in individuals, in churches, in states, at the very outset. We would have Him strike down the man who was leading others into evil as soon as he acquired a bad pre-eminence. We would not have Him wait till sin is excessive. Therefore do we fancy He has been too patient, and yet, with strange inconsistency, when He is punishing, we fall down and urgently ask if He will not stay His hand! We cannot measure out His patience thus. Both the deferring of punishment and the execution of punishment are ordered in wisdom and love. They must be, for the Lord reigneth, and we should stay on Him, let the darkness about Him be what it may.

As to means of carrying out His will. We acknowledge that the law which binds penalty to guilt is just and good, and can be nothing if it is not irrefragable. We grant that the doom should somehow be in correspondence with the sin. But what will be the wisest and most impressive way of manifesting the connection which thus subsists? We are utterly unable to tell, and our prayers might be

offered against the very method which we would assent to as right and best, if we knew all. But assuming that there are two chief classes of sins to provide against—inhumanity and denial of God's interference with the doings of men—we should look for a wonderful variety of treatment according to men's circumstances and place in the world's development. It is for us not only to pray for the mercy we wish for troubled souls, but also to wait on the Lord so as to see His goings. "Those who take heed to the signs of the times can hardly but observe the tendency of our age to ignore the God of special providence, saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?'" Nor can we fail to mark a prevalence of dishonesty, brutality, self-pleasing, which indicate sad disregard of love to man. What may follow we leave with God while we cry for His grace. Only we do well to remember that judgment will begin at the house of God, and that the sufferings of unfaithful Christians will be more awful than those of rebellious Jews. "What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy living and godliness!"

V. Yet such prayers are answered, but otherwise than directly. We are too disposed to conclude that many of our prayers are not granted—prayers in which we had not regard to iniquity but to Christ. It may be, it is true that often they are not granted in accordance with the express form which we had hoped for, and we become like thoughtless children who complain that their wishes for good are not attended to because their father does not give them the very thing they want and at the time they ask it. We ought to have more confidence in our Heavenly Father than that complaint implies. He who says, "Call upon me and I will answer thee," "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do," is true and faithful. What He has said He will do, only it lies with Him to settle both the form and the season of the answer. He brought the man who had been setting a mark upon the mourners in Zion in view of Ezekiel, and that appearance told Ezekiel that his prayer was really answered. He said to Paul, in response to his thrice-told entreaty, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my power is made perfect in weakness;" and though that was not what the Apostle besought for—the removal of the thorn in the flesh—it was tantamount to that, as the promise secured him against being overcome by his infliction. Were we able to see better, we might come to say of many of our apparently unsatisfied prayers, "Verily God hath heard me; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer."

Wait for the unfolding of the sealed book, and then will many rejoice to learn that they had not prayed in vain when they besought that God would glorify Himself by saving men. They died in the sorrow of hopes disappointed; they live in the joy of better things than they could conceive. Let us learn to trust God as revealed in Jesus Christ, His Son, and endeavour to observe more closely how He responds to our prayers.

Faithfulness in Stewardship (ver. 11).

In fulfilling any work for the manifestation of the Lord's will—

I. There should be regard to the Lord who appoints it. A position in His service is wished for sometimes because it is counted honourable and respectable, or because it is profitable, or because it is best to take it even if we have no interest in its duties. All such motives are condemned. The only one which can stand in the light is that which prompts us to act because we have been directed by considerations of His will, and are desirous to please Him to the utmost. "He that regardeth the day regardeth it unto the Lord." This is capable of being *an ever-present motive to faithfulness.* It may influence us everywhere, whether we eat or drink, buy or sell, worship alone or with others. He is always at our right hand where we are and where we are called to serve, and we can do whatever we do as before Him. *An elastic motive.* When we need much power we are moved towards the treasures of Almightiness; when we need little, we come to the same Mighty One who is wise to measure out the adequate supply. He will furnish us for a gentle

or a stern service, for presenting a reward or a threat, for expressing a sentence of mercy or of condemnation. We serve not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, —that will regulate us in our "daily round," and in dying for Him if need be.

II. Regard to the manner of obeying. "As Thou hast commanded." Faithfulness is shown not in doing the appointed service with slovenliness, as if any way of fulfilling it would be sufficient; not in self-regard, as if the way we would like to do it would be satisfactory; not with deference to the opinions and habits of any men, as if they had authority to curtail or enlarge the commands of God; not with limitations, as if we could stop at any point but the point which the Holy One has defined. No; the work of the watcher is not done till he has reached, taught, comforted, saved all whom the Lord has characterised. "He will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

III. Regard to the account to be rendered. No faithful servant need go in fear to the tribunal of the Great King. They who obtain mercy to be faithful have boldness in the day of judgment, are not ashamed before Christ at His coming, give in their account with joy, and are enabled to say, in reference to the charge which had been committed to them, "Lord, it is done as Thou hast commanded." He is the pattern of perfect faithfulness who did always that which was pleasing to the Father; who could say at the close of the day in which he did His work, "I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do," and who will meet the consummation of all things with the words, "Of all that Thou hast given me I have lost nothing." Let us imitate Christ Jesus in doing the will of our Father, not negligently, or equivocally, or incompletely, but so as "to be counted worthy of that world, and to stand before the Son of Man." Let us, in all we do, for the glory of Christ's name, follow His example, and report every matter to our God in prayer and supplication.

(3.) The Setting Fire to Jerusalem, with the Withdrawal from the Temple (Chap. x.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 1-8. The sealing of the remnant has proved the faithfulness of the Lord to His covenant; the conflagration of the city will prove His justice by the punishment of the violators of His covenant. But before the sentence is executed the prophet is again made specially cognisant of the truth that the heavens do rule—that not only was he commissioned by the God of Israel, but also that he must be imbued with the profound conviction that every calamity which befalls the guilty city proceeds from the agencies which underlie the sapphire throne of the everlasting King. "Four potencies are engaged in the destruction of the city—He who sits on the throne, the man clothed in linen, the fire, and the cherub who hands it to the angel. The former two are absolutely ruling, the latter two absolutely ministering" (*Heng.*) The divine glory is manifested in changing aspects, and, while similar to the presentation in the plain of Chebar, yet shows a few differences in form and procedure. "And, to make it more manifest that the judgment is in vindication of His injured holiness and on account of the sins which had been committed against His covenant, the scene of the judicial action is laid in the Temple itself" (*Fair.*) Reading vers. 1–3, 6, 7, 13, 15a, 18, 19, we get the account of what took place; the remaining verses give elucidations of the scene.

Ver. 1. When the watcher ceased to speak, Ezekiel's attention was directed to the change of scenery. "And I saw, and, behold, upon the firmament which was over the head of the cherubim," though the prophet had not recognised this special organisation till later on (ver. 20), yet he keeps to the designation throughout this vision a he did to that of "living creatures throughout his first vision, the r for the change of words probably

the presence of cherubic representation in the Temple; "as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne;" no rainbow appears now. Mercy, in a sense, is past—the marking of the spared ones is completed, and there is scope for woe only. Besides, the appearance of the likeness of a man is not noticed here, but it is indicated by the issuing of a voice. The King was on the throne, though invisible to His servant.

Ver. 2. "**And he said unto the man clothed with linen, Go between the wheels, to below the cherub;**" to the space where, not material fire, but the symbol of destruction, which was in its consequences to make Jerusalem like Sodom and Gomorrah, had been seen (chap. i. 13); and he had a direct act to do there, "**fill thy hands with coals of fire,**" putting his two hands together so as to make a hollow space, "**and scatter over the city;**" the fiery coals were to destroy Jerusalem, as is illustrated by the words of Isaiah (xxxiii. 12, 14), "And the people shall be as the burnings of lime; as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire . . . The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" "**And he came before my eyes.**" It is noteworthy that the man who had put the saving mark on the foreheads is now commissioned to be the agent by whom the desolation of Jerusalem is accomplished. "God has no class of servants too holy or sacred to act, if need be, in the execution of righteous judgments." Guilt and fiery doom must be proclaimed as well as forgiveness and blessedness: yet punishment will pave the way for salvation. When the Lord washes away the defilement of the daughter of Zion, and purges the blood from Jerusalem by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning, then shall be a place of refuge, and a covert from storm and rain (Isa. iv.)

Ver. 3. The man's commission is not performed until the position which is taken by the divine glory and its accompanying phenomena is defined. Ezekiel observes that "**the cherubim were standing at the right of the house when the man came,**" *i.e.*, they were on the south side, ready for moving away from the Temple. The avengers had come from the north; they began to slay at the sanctuary; the city, which was about to be laid in ashes, was built southwards of the temple, and at that quarter the glory was impelled to depart from its chosen place; "**and the cloud filled the inner court;**" as in the Revelation (chap. xv. 8), "The Temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power," and wrath was going forth from the sacred place.

Ver. 4. "**And the glory of the Lord rose, from over the cherub, over the threshold of the house**"—a similar movement to that in chap. ix. 3, but with the signification here that its departure was now taking place. He leaves a shadow behind and casts a light before Him: "**and the house was filled with the cloud**"—with the vehicle for the divine glory, which, as the pillar of the cloud to the Egyptians, had a dark aspect in the house, so we conclude from the context, "**and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the Lord.**" Conjectural assertions as to what the cloud portended, and what the brightness, do not seem to be fruitful as explanations. All that appears clear is that the protection and guidance, which were associated with the presence of the glory, would no longer be granted to Jerusalem.

Ver. 5. The movement of the glory of the Lord was accompanied by the movement of the cherubim. "**And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard to the outer court,**" into which we must suppose Ezekiel had gone from the inner, and from which he could see what took place. It was a thunderous sound (Ps. xxix. 3), as in the former vision, expressive of the force with which the strokes of the wings were propelled, but conveying more than Hengstenberg suggests. "If the cherub is the concentration of all created life on earth, then its sound is the concentration of all sound on earth."

Ver. 6 Now Ezekiel returns to the

point he had reached at ver. 2. The command to the man is again rehearsed, and it is added, "**he came and stood beside the wheel**" (*Sing.*); not some specially-appointed wheel, but that one which happened to be nearest as he went for the fire.

Vers. 7 and 8. "**And the cherub,**" the one next to the wheel beside which the man was, "**stretched forth his hand from between the cherubim unto the fire that was between the cherubim, and lifted and gave into the hands of the man clothed in linen, and he took and went out**" towards the doomed city, not now as the mediator of salvation, but as an executor of judgment. It is not stated that he scattered the fire then. Either Ezekiel's vision was filled with some other sight, so that he did not observe the incidence of the destruction, or else a space of time was allowed to intervene. The latter seems most probable. The burning lies beyond the next chapter, where the glory goes away, and Ezekiel ceases to see the vision of Jerusalem. An explanatory remark is made as to the instrument of action in the cherubim: "**the likeness of the hand of a man under their wings:**" the symbol of human agency and activity is associated with that part of their bodies by which they could be swift in fulfilling their prescribed work, and whose movements were heard far off. The hand "may be naturally regarded as indicating that human agents should not be wanting, at the proper time, to carry into effect the judgment written" (*Fair.*) "Those who burned the city were immediately the Chaldeans, who are included under the cherubim; but behind them stood another" (*Heng.*)

HOMILETICS.

Unestimated Influences on Human Life.

A new departure in the development of God's people was taking effect. Their exile and slaughter, with the desecration of the most holy place, were events which did not result merely from Chaldean forces or natural elements, but really from Him who directs all living and inanimate things. To bring the Israelites out of the notion that they were secured against evil because of past favours received on past obedience rendered; to impress on them the latent truth that the Lord did not rule His procedure by the external words or acts of men, but by the spirit which breathed in them; to give indications of a time when He would be to all people that which He had been to one, these seem to be the grounds for the manifestations of this section. In reference to them there is signified—

I. An invisible governor. The spirit of Ezekiel sees tints of the Eternal Majesty, and becomes aware of words spoken by Him whom he does not name. In his state is a representation of that which has been experienced by multitudes. They know that God is within range of their susceptibilities, that He coins impressions from which thought and feeling proceed. They are sure that, whatever be the persons or things by which they are affected, He is King over each and all. If any wonder or even mock at the confidence they profess to have in an unseen Ruler, they reply, "I know whom I have believed;" for beneath all that is palpable they believe in God who is a Spirit, and who is King for ever and ever. "They walk by faith, not by sight."

II. Manifold agents. *In their diversity.* A half-unconscious tendency disposes us to refer every good thing to the action of God, every hard, ruinous thing to the action of some law. It is a trick of our minds. If painful and disastrous things come out of broken laws, pleasant and helpful things come out of obeyed laws. And the truth symbolised in man, in cherubim, and in fire, is, that all effects, brought about by multitudinous agencies, are but the phenomenal forms of the purposes of the perfect will. The Son of God, the angels of God, men who hurt, men who suffer, coals of fire, hailstones and frost, execute a commission given by

the Creator of the ends of the earth. Whatever the variety of influences which affect us, we are still with God.

In their versatility. The fire that comforts can destroy: living beings may fulfil their ends by running, flying, standing, making sounds, or carrying from place to place: the Lord Jesus says, "I will draw all men unto me," and He also says, "Depart from me; I never knew you." All changed conditions, in the action of natural and spiritual agencies, depend upon changes in the objects acted upon. The ministry of wrath follows the movements of wrong. They shall dwell with the devouring fire who sin and do not repent of their ungodliness. They "shall be salted with fire" who walk righteously and speak uprightly.

In their concurrence. In the order of nature forces are correlated, and in the moral order joy and ease may be transmuted into sorrow and pains, privileges into penalties, the honour of God's dwelling-place into the uncleanness of foul orgies. Pray, wait, obey, and you will become an organ of the Lord where He will and how He will; do evil, and His face will be set against you—the light which is in you will become darkness.

III. Repeated warnings of danger. The glory moving to the threshold told of the rupture of the ties which had bound God to His people, while the sound of the wings and the taking of fire intimated that the doom of Jerusalem was on the point of being inflicted. Penalty is preceded by witness-bearing and sentences. If men neglect the immutable principles of right, if they find in their own ways the pleasure and service which they ought to find in His, He does not go on at once to destroy them. He has given them faculties by which they may discern the signs of the sky that portend a storm, so has He qualified them to notice coming evils in appearances which are passing before their eyes. He lingers that He may correct them with the words of His mouth and the events of their lives. Thus does He warn them, and from the manner in which the Bible, prayer, sanctuaries are regarded, a Christian people can conclude whether the glory has gone from their midst, and the light and truth are about to consume all despisers. He does not always force those coming tribulations upon our notice. "The works of God are done by hidden and secret means, by ways unthought of, by hands under wings. Invisible virtue hath done more than all visible instruments." Yet, latent as they are, it is demanded from us that we watch and be sober under influences which seem to threaten our welfare, that so we may escape all those things that shall come to pass, and stand before the Son of Man.

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 9–22. The description of the cherubim and of their movements is similar to, but independent of, that given in chap. i. Ezekiel is not prostrated as at first, and seems to see the subordinate details of the vision more distinctly. On this occasion the appearances were to be closely observed, being of great significance to the whole house of Israel. He has to connect that which he saw in the land of exile with this in the temple. He has thus a proof that he is no self-constituted messenger of the Lord to His people, that the divine glory shed its lights and shadows over the captives as well as in Jerusalem, that a change in the procedure of God was taking effect, and He would never again associate Himself with the temple-worship as in days of old. All the energies of creation fitted to carry out the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God were ready to be put in operation.

Vers. 9–12. These four wheels were so arranged as that one should be beside each cherub, "and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of Tarshish stone." Ver. 11. "When they went they went toward their four sides"—to that one of the four quarters towards which each wheel was severally placed—"for to the place to which the head turned, after it they went," this was noticeable that, though they might go in any direction, yet they always moved forward. They did so in accordance with the movement, not of a special

wheel which was chief over the other three, but of that one of the wheels which happened to face the direction in which all were to roll, and ever in harmony with the cherubim. Ver. 12. "**And all their flesh, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and their wheels were full of eyes round about;**" obviously the cherubim are included in this feature as well as the wheels, and correspond to the aspect of the living creatures as seen by John (Rev. iv. 6). This interruption of the description of the wheels, by a reference to the cherubim, may have been made to show how all forces were gifted with certain similar capabilities, and because the cherubim—the vital forces—were the more important: "**to the four of them their wheels**" is the literal rendering. If the Hebrew text is not corrupt, the phrase can only mean that to cherubim and wheels eyes were furnished all over.

Ver. 13. Any perplexity found in this verse may be dissipated by regarding it as an address to the wheels to get into motion. "**To the wheels—to them was cried in my ears, Whirl,**" or *the whirling*. There are two Hebrew words used which are both rendered in A. V. by wheel. The distinction between them can only be maintained by some such translation as is given here. It is something like the distinction between "wheels" and "the entire machinery of wheel-work, wheel within wheel, as visible to Ezekiel and capable of quick, whirlwind-like movements." The cry which the prophet heard, which was to impress on him the truth that the Lord was controlling all actions affecting Israel, signified that the wheels were to verify their nature by revolving. The result of this call to them is noted in ver. 15.

Ver. 14. The aspect of the cherubim is defined preparatory to their rising up. "**And four faces were to every one.**" Ezekiel goes on to mention, not each of the four faces, but that face of each which confronted him: "**the face of the first was the face of the cherub.**" This defines nothing, though the succeeding clauses do define the face of a man, of a lion, of an eagle. Some commentators hold that the Hebrew word should be altered into that for "ox." This is not to be thought of. It would be understood to be that by reference to the former vision (chap. i. 10). The definite article prefixed does not mean that the face of this cherub was the only cherubic face, but rather, as Fairbairn suggests, that Ezekiel saw the whole features of the cherub which happened to be nearest to him and had given the fire to the watcher, while in the cases of the other three he saw one face only.

Vers. 15–17. The command to whirl is obeyed by the cherubim ascending, and by the revolution of the wheels in harmony with their movements. "**And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them . . . when these stood they stood, and when these rose up they rose up with them.**" They move together if they move at all, and in perfect unison. All created energies, whether apparently quiescent or active, are imbued with the spirit of life.

Vers. 18, 19. Another movement of deepest significance was observed. "**And the glory of the Lord went forth from above the threshold,**" to which it had gone a short time previously (ver. 4), "**and stood above the cherubim;**" this return is a stage towards the entire departure of the Lord from His temple, and indicates that the people might observe it, if they would not close their eyes. Having received the glory, "**the cherubim lifted up their wings, and rose up from the earth before my eyes in their going forth, and the wheels beside them, and it,**" the whole appearance—the glory, the cherubim, and the wheels—"**stood at the opening of the gate of the Lord's house, the eastern;**" by this entrance the covenanted God would, in symbol, leave the temple, and by it, at a future period, He would come again (chap. xliii. 2–4).

Vers. 20–22. Now that the impending departure is on the verge of becoming an accomplished fact, that becomes definite to the prophet which he had stated already (ver. 15) in a parenthetical way. He has a fuller revelation than before, and realises the import of the former

vision which had been granted to him at the Chebar. "This was the living creature which I saw under the God of Israel, and I knew that they were cherubim." We may be hardly justified to say that he had doubted whether they were the cherubim which he had seen, but, at any rate, he is certain now of the identity of appearances in both visions. The Glory which has enthroned itself over the living four and hovers at the gate of the temple, if not in all points the same in form as the cherubim over the mercy-seat, are the cherubim between whom the Lord dwelleth, and they expressly appeared to him in the land of exile. Thus is Ezekiel assured by the God of Israel that, if He abandons His chosen seat, He does not abandon His people—that He is with them in their captivity to show His ways and teach His paths. This assurance of likeness is reiterated: "they are the same faces which I saw by the river Chebar—their appearances and themselves." Not merely their external aspect, but their substance had one common resemblance.

HOMILETICS.

God in Human Activity (ver. 10).

In this vision, the wings and hands, the wheels and eyes, are parts of a mystery dark with excess of light. Just as to one who knows not the plan of a battle, the noise, the clouds of smoke, and the movements of armies confuse and confound. Yet the clause which tells of a wheel within a wheel, the activity of a hidden power, may bring a lesson to our bosom and business. The thought suggested here is this, the Lord God Omnipotent thrusts forth silently and successfully His hand into the being and working of every man. Reason and the kingdom of God will prevail, and not the devil and those who do devilish work. The wrath of man shall praise God. He, like the engineer with hand on lever, holds the forces of the world.

By a wheel within a wheel God governs and makes all things work together for good to those who love Him: all pleasant and all painful things; all that is mean, contemptible, slanderous, all that vexes and annoys. So we may put on gladness, knowing that He overrules each event of life, and while we work He worketh in us according to His good pleasure.

I. **The Scriptures affirm this truth.** They are as full of the evidences of it as the daily press is full of the records of man's working in individual and national life. Take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth, God is there; or descend into hell, and He is there. The devil is wheeled about by Him there.

The broad wheel of an evil destiny seemed once to crush Joseph, but he devoutly and magnanimously said to his brothers, "Ye thought evil, God meant it for good." There was also a wheel at work in the life of Jacob, to whom in a dark hour celestial comfort came—angels on the ladder; in the peril of Daniel in the den, whose heroic fidelity led a pagan king to say, "There is no God like the God of Daniel;" in the case of David who, in his loss of Absalom, found it good to be afflicted; in the alarm of the servant at Dothan, and in the weeping of Peter. Eyes see clearer washed with tears. Paul could glory in his infirmities, for he saw even in them that the power of Christ was made glorious. In all the pains and penalties, the joys and griefs, the thoughts and imaginations of life, God is busy, out of evil still educing good.

II. **History proves this.** Never did men meet behind closed doors as in Masonic secrecy without God seeing them. Every plot and conspiracy is known to Him. The Gunpowder Plot, the Spanish Armada, the American Rebellion, were carefully planned, but God overthrew them all. There was a wheel within a wheel. The Jews were persecuted and peeled, they were ever an easy prey to the

spoiler, now they are the bankers and the traders of the world, and hold seats of power among the nations. The Puritans were persecuted, and you know the result. The thing you intend to accomplish carries with it a score of things you did not intend to do. Luther and Columbus accomplished more than ever they dreamed of doing, because God was in their movements. A poor man said to me, "I've failed, I never was in such a strange, unique position." Ah! what is failure? Was ever there such a failure, apparently, as that which Christ made? All men forsook Him and fled. What is failure? I think of God's slaughtered saints "on Alpine summits cold;" of the thousands who have perished in the Inquisition; of Jonah hurled into the sea to save the ship; of many who fall in battle, while victory crowns the survivors, and I ask what is failure? God's word says that, "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished." Even "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." Yes—

III. The laws of nature illustrate this. Say to the righteous it shall be well with them, and to the wicked that the wheel of God is working against them. The thunderstorm is His scavenger, driving off malaria and noxious vapour. The biting frost, that bent low my flowers, drove the plague from one of our cities. The earthquake is a safety-valve by which imprisoned gases are set free. Weeds, thistles, insects are made to work out some good. As Shakespeare says—

> "There is some sort of goodness in things evil,
> Would men observingly distil it out."

Remark:

1. *We cannot get along without God.* If we choose to rebel against His working, He will curse and overthrow us. If we lead selfish, prayerless, cruel lives, He will thwart and destroy. God has punished nations who forgot Him. Go to their graves to-day. O Judea, whose poets, prophets, and priests were the admiration of thy nation, why art thou peeled and conquered? "We rejected the Holy One and would not obey Him." O fair Greece, the home of orators and philosophers! and thou, O stately Rome on thy seven hills! why is Ichabod written on thy temples, and thy palaces in dust, with men digging among thy ruins? "We forgot justice, oppressed the poor, and listened not to the truth." It may be said to this land in time to come, O great country, why hast thou fallen? "We hasted to be rich and turned away from God, our lips being filled with lying and our lives with injustice." Men and nations in prosperity often forget God, and, proud of their might, go forth as Samson did to shake himself when "he wist not that the Lord had departed from him." We live and move in God, and it is true that He lives and moves in us. Our prayer should be, "Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah!"

2. *Nothing happens which does not help him who loves God.* Losses, crosses, abuse, injury, lead to the growth of patience, watchfulness, and the silent bearing of sorrow. Burn your own smoke and go on. It is often darkest before dawn. Our trials help to build up character.

3. *The love of God is emphasized by the truth before us.* All the verses of the Bible end here—in the love of God. He reigns—not sin, not sorrow, not death. He wipes away every tear. He destroys the last enemy. His Hand guides the course of nations. Not Victoria, not Kaiser William, not the president of a republic is at the helm. God is Governor among the people. Trust in Him. Rejoice in Him. He will lead us, and will lead the world even to the end.—*Gallaher.*

The Perfect Order (ver. 13).

We see a subordination of causes, one to another, and all under one Supreme.

I. The supreme cause. He has the appearance as of a man. He speaks as with man's voice. There is a prefiguration of the incarnation, of the Mediator ruling His providential kingdom. Infinite power and wisdom are His. If He

will pull down, who can hold up? If He will suspend His action, who can impel the curbed forces to move? His ways are high above, out of our sight. We may see the hand outside, we cannot see the living Spirit within. We are in a world of changes, in which nothing happens by chance, but each change is subordinated to the will of Christ.

II. **The subordinate causes.** Wheels are all things that are moved. They are absolutely acted on by the word of the Lord. He alone can make them execute the objects for which they are created, and at the seasons which He knows to be most fitted for the good and the true amongst men. They rise up to the highest, they descend to the inferior influences which operate in human societies. They go straight on to the points to which they are directed, and turn not from the execution of their commission.

He reigns over all things and persons. His voice fixes the destinies of earth. He will guide us by His counsel. So all impatience with the dealings of God is groundless; all murmuring is sinful, and we should learn to listen to His voice, to be diligent and persevering in doing His work, to long that one duty or trial should fit us for the next duty or trial.—*M.*

Feet and Wings.

"*When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also*" (x. 17). [Refer to chap. i. 24.]

Flying creatures have wings for the air and feet for the ground. This touch of nature is put on God's cherubim. The prophet intends no special religious lesson here, but the fact he cites may be used to convey such.

I. **The subject of Christian experience, what it is and how to be maintained.** We have faculties of locomotion, feeding, sense, perception, &c., by which we act our parts on foot as it were. We have attributes of faith-perception, love-appropriation, spiritual imagination, in which we become aërial creatures, resting suspensively in things above the world. This uplifting produces the transcendent mystery of experience in Christian conversion. We rise by trust in God—admitting the full revelation of His truth and friendship. When we rest ourselves, our life and life-character on God, we prove Him, and have the sense of Him revealed to our immediate knowledge. This faith is not in something about God. It is the man's new, self-committing act, by which he puts himself out on trust and begins to live on God. It is a sublime act of migration upward into the range of spirit, and all things are new.

Can the soul thus lifted stay in that serene element? It has gravitations which pull it all the while downward, and settle it on its feet, as the flying creatures fold their wings when they settle. Let us trace some of the instances and ways in which it ceases to live by faith.

When a man of enterprise thinks of independence, how easily, how insensibly he ceases to hang on Providence as he did. His prayers lose their fervour. God is far less dear and less consciously present; and how long will he have the consciousness of His presence at all?

When there is overdoing the search after evidences of faith. What is the evidence of faith but faith itself, as we get evidence of warmth by heat which we cannot find through any inspection? And if evidence to a man is made up, he has made good his proofs. He is down on his feet.

When the disciple who is on the ground thinks to recover himself by his will instead of going back to faith. God is forgotten, and the harder throes he makes the deeper he sinks.

When disciples subside into a mere routine practice, or observance of times. It is no longer a service of impulse and liberty. They hope there may be some

good in it, only of a duller sort than it should be. How much better if their faith had but a one-wing power; it would lift them a few feet upward now and then.

When a disciple shortens the distance between himself and the world that he may shorten the distance between the world and himself. There is the possibility of an over-austere practice; but the study of conformities is one in which none but a man of inflexible tenacity should ever dare to indulge, and only he when he is high enough lifted by his faith in God to suffer no bent downward. Cultivating the conformities is a plausible way of being mixed in them. Whoever undertakes to grade and gauge a ground-surface road will not be ascending into faith at all.

When a disciple thinks to fortify faith by practised investigation and deeper studies in matters of opinion. Benefits may thus be gained; but he is likely to seek his light in questions of the understanding and not by faith; then he is down upon the levels of mere nature. We think we touch bottom. We are going to be floated no more. But our solidity turns out to be a living on deductions, not on the uplifting grace of God's inspirations. We thus settle out of grace into formulations of grace, when, of course, our wings are down.

Our conclusion is, that the moment any disciple touches ground with but the tip of his foot, and begins to rest on earthly props, a mortal weakness takes him, and he goes down. Only a calm and loving return to his trust will recover him, and God is faithful enough to be trusted at all times. Let there be this rest by faith, and he will carry himself more steadily. in studies, toils, or engagements. Sometimes obscurations may occur, but he has only to believe the more strongly and wait till they be cleared.

II. Many persons miss ever going above a service on foot, by not conceiving at all the more ethereal range of experience, into which true faith would lift them. Sometimes they become reformers or philanthropists. They mean business in their religion, caring little for the fervours that are not fervours of work. The combining and rolling up of great masses of opinion are the means by which they expect to carry their projects. Censure and storm and fiery denunciation are close at hand. They, many times, do not conceive that they are disciples because of their repentances, or their prayers, or sensing of God by their faith, or any other grace that separates them from the world. They have much to say of love, but they visibly hate more strongly than they love. They never go above to descend upon the reform by inspirations there kindled; they keep on their feet, and war with the evils on the same level with them.

Sometimes they attempt self-culture in the name of religion. They could mend defects, chasten faults, put themselves in the charities they have learned from Christ, perhaps, to admire; but the work is a far more hopeless one than they imagine, if there is no uplifting help from gracious inspirations. Besides, the work keeps to a continual self-contemplation which is selfish. Old faults will come back, and they will have to fight all over again. Vexed, soured, discouraged, the whole undertaking may be given up. Oh, if they would go up to Christ, or to God in a true faith-culture, faults would fall off, as blasted flowers from a tree, by the life-principle therein. No man finishes a character who does not go above himself, and take the culture of God's own Spirit.

Sometimes they settle down to ritualism. We all begin, almost unwittingly, to have a religion that is manipulated by our senses and sensuous tastes. We are caught by the forms. All the better that they are so nearly level with our natural faculties, and just as easy to be used without faith as with! How convenient to have a religion that lets the faiths and the fervours take care of themselves! Saying prayers, too—how much easier than to pray and find how to be heard. Thus a sufficient religion is got below; but the sad thing is, that instead of giving the disciple free wing, it keeps him down; so that if he becomes more earnest in it, it is turned into a superstition.

Sometimes they suppose they are religious because of a certain patronage they give to the Church and the word. Not being in the gift of spiritual discernment, their tastes will be the better; and as there are always a great many reasons why a thing should not be done to any single reason why it should, they assume to be specially qualified critics. They contribute these critical powers, while others, less gifted, may contribute their prayers! Such negatives do not belong to the range of the Spirit, but to the nether world of fashion, or opinion, or custom. The critics have feet but no wings. If they could give themselves over in trust to the Saviour, instead of giving their opinions and tastes, their contributions would be of worthier significance.

Sometimes they distrust experiences in religion, divine monitions, answers to prayer, calls to particular duties and works. They like the level of nature. All supernatural upliftings and fervours are fantasies that had best be avoided. Inspirations are nothing; judgments everything. What shall we say of that story which the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians? It was his way to be going up into high regions, so that he was not sure, at times, whether he had a thing by revelation or not. People called him "mad," because he did not stay on foot, in their level of sanity. But was there ever a soul more massive and sublimely steady in its equilibrium than his?

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? That the Christian idea of religion is not any mere playing out of nature as its own level; but is the lifting up of the man above himself in a transformation that makes him new. In so far as he is a Christian, he becomes the citizen of another kingdom. Whatever disrespect he may encounter, he will have evidences in himself that ask no certification. He will have learned that the only safe way of living is the highest. Here his internal jars and discords are laid and a glorious serenity is established. The earth is not his mother; if he descends to the ground his strength vanishes.

If we are to make an ascent into this higher plane of experience, the ties which hold our feet must be effectually cut by habitual self-renunciations. Selfishness and self-indulgence are no more for us. We must lift up everything we do in the world and hope from it, into that pure life of sacrifice and trust in which we abide with the Master. We must be as Noah when the Lord shut him in the ark, and be severed from every natural trust. Our expectation must be rested on God, not on pillars of any kind below—pillars are not wanted under wings.—*Bushnell, abridged.*

(4.) The Calamity Threatened to Jerusalem (Chap. xi. 1–13).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The movements of the Glory of the Lord are intermitted for a time. During that interval a new condition is entered into by Ezekiel. Hitherto, notwithstanding the unfolding of so many abominations before his eyes, and by which his heart must have been greatly distressed, his lips have been sealed in regard to any denunciation of them. Now, when the cherubic throne is hovering over the east gate, he is led to that spot and is empowered to utter a severe rebuke against the representatives of Jerusalem, and also to declare promises to the elders who represented the exiled.

Ver. 1. Ezekiel is placed by the spirit-power at the gate of the temple-court, under the Glory, "and, behold, in the opening of the gate twenty-five men." This number makes us think of the twenty-five men mentioned in chap. viii. 16; but we cannot suppose them, as some do, to be the same. *They* were worshipping the sun, and we should conclude that they were slain by the watchers with the weapon of destruction. Besides, the standing-place of the twenty-five of chap. viii. indicated that they were priests. *That* is not indicated here, and we are rather led to believe, from the position of the present twenty-five, and from their characterisation (ver. 3), that they re

present civil authorities who were consulting with one another on matters of state; "**and I saw in their midst Jaazaniah the son of Azur,**" therefore not the elders of Israel he had previously seen (chap. viii. 11), "**and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people.**" It is most likely that the two princes named were living in Jerusalem at that time, and noted as being leaders among the dominant party. Or they may have been singled out in order to point to the inconsistency between their names and the course they advocated. The Lord who hears (Jaazaniah) and who helps (Azur): the Lord who delivers (Pelatiah) and builds up (Benaiah); and they were departing from the Lord!

Vers. 2, 3. "**These are the men that devise mischief and give evil counsel in this city;**" they set up an opposition to God's messages, and provoke His wrath. The gist of their opposition is stated; but the Hebrew construction does not favour the translation of the A. V. The curtness of the phraseology renders the meaning obscure. "**Who say, Not in nearness [is] the building of houses, it [is] the caldron and we [are] the flesh.**" Any interpretation must take account of this as the evil counsel, and that it was held to be audaciously iniquitous. It obviously refers to some circumstances of that period, and we may find them indicated in that prophecy of Jeremiah in which he instructed the captive Jews to build houses, &c. (chap. xxix. 5). These princes scoffed at that message thus, "Those who are far off, in a land of exile, may take, if they please, the prophet's advice and build houses for themselves there. That does not concern us here—it is too remote a district from ours. Let Jerusalem be a pot, which Jeremiah (chap. i. 13) declares is to smoke and boil by the fury of a hostile invasion from the north, then we shall be the flesh within it; its strong fortifications and sure defences shall preserve us against any flame of war that may kindle around us. We have no occasion to be terrified or succumb to warnings." So they rejected the ways of the Lord and trusted to their own devices; and would such a defiant spirit, on the part of those who were called to honour Him, be met by the Lord?

Ver. 5. The impelling might of the Spirit moves Ezekiel to an utterance, "Thus saith the Lord, So ye say, O house of Israel, and what riseth up in your spirit, I know it." Not only is He cognisant of their overt words and several plottings, but also of the real aims and wishes which underlie their proceedings, and holds them responsible (ver. 6) for the consequences resulting therefrom.

Ver. 7. "**Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Your slain, whom ye have placed in the midst of it, they are the flesh and it is the caldron.**" *Your* slain are those who had been cut down through the outrages of the princes themselves (see chap. xxiv.), and also those who perished because of the wicked counsels whose effect had been to bring the Chaldean army against Jerusalem. "Ezekiel gives them back their own words, as containing an undoubted truth, but in a different sense from that in which they had used them." There will be flesh protected in the caldron from the fire, but it will represent those who are slain. A grim satire: The dead are the safe! "**And one shall bring you forth from its midst;**" the princes and their abettors should not be defended in the city. They should be taken out of it to answer for their crimes.

Ver. 9. "**A sword ye have feared, and a sword will I make to come upon you, saith the Lord Jehovah.**" They were in apprehension of the war which had been pressed on by the king of Babylon, and, contrary to the urgent representations of Jeremiah, made a coalition with Egypt; yet, notwithstanding their schemings, "**the hand of strangers,**" the Chaldean forces, would perpetrate violent deeds under the impact of divine impulses.

Vers. 11, 12. The supposed security would be invaded: the city would not be a caldron for them; taken away from it, "**on the frontier of Israel will I judge you;**" they would be captives, and taken to the extremity of their land

to undergo punishment. Jeremiah narrates (chap. xxxix. 4, 5) how this threat was fulfilled in the bloody scenes at Ribla in Hamath on the northern border of Israel, and where, as an Assyrian tablet in the British Museum tells, the headquarters of Nebuchadnezzar were on this expedition. Like all other tribulations, this had for its ulterior end to work the conviction that the Lord was their only real king, "in whose statutes ye walked not, and whose judgments ye did not; but ye did according to the judgments of the nations round about you:" a difference from what was stated in chap. v. 7, as to surrounding nations; but evidently referring here to such corrupt practices of their neighbours as they copied. The materials, out of which proceeded the destruction of the then existing Jewish government, are thus set forth, and, that destruction being so distinctly predicted, the people should learn that it was with the most perfect reason that God claimed for Himself the honour of supreme ruler. "It is lamentable if we must gain the knowledge of God by our own destruction,—if He, in whom we live and move and are, is first recognised by the strokes which break our own head" (*Heng.*)

Ver. 13. A portentous event impresses the prophetic words. "And it came to pass that as I was prophesying Pelatiah, the son of Benaiah, died." Though this incident is still part of Ezekiel's ecstasy, it is probable that one of the chief advisers of Jerusalem died about the time in some such awfully sudden manner and when surrounded by his fellows in the temple. The effect on the sensitive Seer is great, and suggests bitter and painful thoughts as to the slaughter of his people as happened previously (chap. ix. 8): "and I fell on my face, and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah Lord Jehovah, dost Thou make an utter end of the remnant of Israel?" He speaks as if he had forgotten all grounds of hope, and as if the people in the capital were the real representatives of Israel in whose mournful fate all Israel would be overwhelmed and lost. He will learn that it is otherwise.

HOMILETICS.

Refuges of Lies broken up.

Under the boastings of its leading men the people of Jerusalem were living in fancied security. They had heard from Jeremiah the prophet announcements of coming woes; but they put far from themselves the evil day, and buoyed themselves up with the expectation that, even if it did come, they would escape its troubles. Theirs is a common state of mind in respect to the truths of God which are wished not to be true, and we need to stand in His light that we may be disabused of our hurtful errors. He aims to help us thereto by a procedure such as is disclosed in this paragraph. He shows that self-constituted refuges—

I. Are based on miscalculations. Men calculate that there is no necessity immediately to renounce past courses: the judge is not standing before the door; the call to watch for the Master's coming can be trifled with for a while. Thus many vaguely feel, if they do not positively present excuses as to the incidence of a season of searching and decisive trial. They may walk on in darkness till that day overtakes them as a thief. For, as all events are uncertain, to risk the present space given for repentance is, it may be, to risk the building of a house without means to finish it, the being overwhelmed by ruin from which there will be no opportunity to escape. We can use "now" but not "then" to flee.

II. They are abortive before God. He knows all that comes into the heart, the mouth, the hands, and so is able to test the real character of each. The stand made by men in self-defence is untenable. Fancies will not shut out afflictions, spring up when they may. No causes, no secret purposes can be so encrusted that they will elude the penetration of the eyes that are as a flame of fire. To

cherish hopes, apart from Christ, that we shall be preserved from future evils, is to cherish hopes on a quicksand over which the tidal wave is beginning to rise. Sins make culprits, and the righteous Lord will not let one elude His sentence, whatever the rank, the numbers, the religious privileges be. Search lest thy refuge lie open to the flood of divine condemnation.

III. They are open to dislocations. *One is from the word of the Lord.* It came by prophets. It has come, in these last days, by a Son. We read, we hear what He hath spoken, and learn that the entire bearing of that word of the living God is to convict of sin and to bring to immediate faith in the Saviour from sin. Again and again were men urged to "Hear the Word of the Lord;" again and again are we urged now, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Another is from the action of human influences. The sword, captivity, spoiling of goods affected the contemporaries of Ezekiel: an ailment, an emigration, a pecuniary loss operate upon us. We shall miss the true reasons for such shakings of our usual affairs, if we do not trace in them the will of the righteous and loving Lord, who would show to us that we have been trusting in that which is of the flesh, who would draw us to plant our feet upon the Rock of ages. "I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their hearts, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil" (Zeph. i. 12).

Thus are records made that the Lord sets His face against our doings that are not good, and that, whether they are to be classed under unfaithfulness to Him or unbrotherliness to men, He will expose them to utter collapse. No schemes, no confidences will be capable of resisting Him. "The Lord is known by the judgment that He executeth."

Who will accept the decisions of the Holy One as to their hopes of safety in coming storms? Who will forsake all and follow Christ? "If you would not be broken by His judgment, do not break His statutes; if you would secure your lives, walk in His laws."

A Vision of Sudden Death (ver. 13).

Painful associations were linked in with the sudden end of Pelatiah's counsel and boastings. While the consensus of human testimony proves that such an immediate cessation of the activities of life is not considered as always stamped with the brand of punishment, it is always regarded as more or less of a calamity. Even they who know that the hand of the Good Shepherd is leading them into the unseen world, yet shrink from this manner of exit from the present world. The feeling is to be accounted for because of—

I. The general mysteriousness. There are no precise premonitions, no apparently gradual preparations. For though such a death must have been preceded by causes adequate to produce it, those causes, whether physical or mental, have not been credited with the deadly force which they exert. The death appears to be the bursting forth of a new and poignant energy, and our hearts are awed by the sad and startling memento which marks its route. Besides, the selection is utterly incomprehensible. Two men are given equal prominence in the course taken by Jerusalem, yet one expires in a moment, and the other still breathes the vital air. One of a family goes in an instant down to the grave, but all the other members go more or less slowly. We may be surprised at the falling of the lot, but we have no light as to its movements. Only this can we be sure of, that He who gave life takes it away in a method that is at once wise and good. "Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

II. The utter helplessness. No nursing, no skill can be made the least use of. We may cry for a parting word, a pressure, a look; but we cry with no

result. We see the living now, in a moment we see they are not, and we can do nothing for them, we can only look. They pass altogether beyond our aid. They seem still beside us, but they have gone—where?

III. An indescribable contiguity of solemn spiritual conditions. Pelatiah is hearing the word of the Lord by Ezekiel, and in the very sound thereof hears the command of the King of terrors. Mercy and judgment stand hand in hand. The hearer becomes at once a dweller in "the silent land." What will be learned there? The judgment of the All Holy, unaffected by any ignorance, misconception, shrinking! What if he be impenitent? What if his tongue be still vibrating with words in which he gave counsel against good? What if he has not cleansed his hands from the filth of dishonest gain or the blood of those he has injured? He is struck powerless. He is in face of iniquity at this step, he is confronted with its penalty at the next.

IV. A shock to natural feelings. Fear for oneself and pity for another cannot be restrained. Surprise and awe might have affected Pelatiah's fellow-counsellors for a time. The effect was transient. They persisted in their wicked devices in the city; they acted in fatal correspondence thereto. Their seasonable impressions, like the morning cloud and early dew, soon vanished away. On the other hand men, with the love to God and man which stirred Ezekiel, pray that such a sudden stroke may not cut down those who are still in their trespasses; they ask for sparing mercy that such persons may be moved to work the works of God before the night cometh in which no man can work. How vain is prayer when the sinners prayed for will go on in evil ways! "How sad it is that the godly should be concerned for the coming doom of transgressors, and yet the transgressors themselves remain unmoved. Let believers imitate Ezekiel, and when judgments descend on some, 'lift up their prayer for the remnant that is left'" (*Fausset*).

Wert thou this moment to go through the gates of death, wouldst thou go as one who had walked or had not walked thereto in the footprints of Jesus? "Watch, for ye know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man cometh."

(5.) Mercy Promised to the Exiles, and Conclusion of the Vision (vers. 14–25).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 14–21. Ezekiel receives, for answer to his urgent appeal, an intimation that the doom of Jerusalem is irrevocable, but that the Lord's people will not be forsaken. Amongst the exiles, who are contemptuously treated by dwellers in the capital, are found tokens of the broken, contrite heart which He does not despise. He will put an end to their captivity, and settle them again in the land of their fathers.

Ver. 15. The utterance of the Lord must have been unexpected. The prophet supposed that they who remained in Jerusalem were the real representatives of Israel, and his yearning for their deliverance was thus intensified. His mistake springs from a common tendency in regard to the kingdom of God. Men look at its externalities. Those who have antiquity and ritual on their side are counted the chosen to good, while they who suffer and are decried are regarded as of no account. Yet in the latter are the germs of mercy from God laid: "thy brethren, thy brethren," the twice-told designation emphatically indicating that Ezekiel is to find his true relations in those with whom he is connected as an exile, however unfavourable their condition: "men of thy kindred"—a translation which apparently causes a tautology, for brethren are kindred; but is grounded on the fact that the Hebrew word refers to the duties of the *goel*,—the blood-relation who took up the responsibilities, poverty, injuries of his kindred (Lev. xxv. 25, 48). Some propose to employ the

primary meaning, and translate the phrase, *men of thy redemption*, those whom thou art bound to ransom, or intercede for to deliver from evil. The ascription of the duties of *goel* to Ezekiel seems far-fetched and forced; but is defended for the reason that it conveys "a peculiar reproach to the proud Jews who have been so ready to cast off the claims of blood-relationship, and at the same time a hope of restoration to those who have been unduly thrown aside" (*Speaker's Com.*) The reading of the LXX is, *the men of thy captivity*, obviously translating the same Hebrew word that is found in ver. 24, and which differs from that read here by a single letter: "and all the house of Israel, all of it," including in this title all Israel wheresoever they were scattered abroad, and who by the phrase seem counted by God as those who constituted the whole house of Israel, "to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem say, Remove far off from the land; to us the land is given for a possession." Captivity, in the eyes of the Jerusalemites, was a cutting off from the covenants and promises; but their residence in the city was a participation in them. They concluded that Israel was to be known by external signs. "Thereby they show how inexperienced they are in the ways of God, how far they are from having the heart of true Israelites, how little they deserve that the prophet should take an interest in them" (*Heng.*)

Ver. 16. "Therefore," seeing that the inhabitants of Jerusalem treat the captives as thrust out from the Lord, He causes His prophet to refer to this despisal and say, "Though I have removed them far off among the nations, and though I have scattered them in the lands," that which their depreciators say is so far true; but the exile is not comfortless and irreversible, "yet I will be to them a sanctuary for a little while:" they are deprived of that which was once My sanctuary, where I manifested My presence, but they shall have one notwithstanding. I Myself will be with them for a season. The A.V., by its translation *a little sanctuary*, makes it seem as if the Lord would give to the captives, in some minor degree, what He had given in the temple. No doubt this was the case. But there is more involved. The exiles would be comforted with the promise of a far greater boon than that of entering within the walls of an earthly temple, and also with the assurance that the duration of their banishment from the temple would be limited. "Canaan was still the land of the covenant; and the presence of the Lord among His people, at a distance from that land, could be only a temporary thing." But by this dealing with them the captives were prepared to give weight to the eternal truth that God dwells not in temples made with hands, that they could worship Him acceptably anywhere, and so new advances were taken towards the coming of Him in whose resurrection-body was seen the temple not made with hands, and through whom all men may come to the Father.

"In what way did the Lord prove Himself to be the sanctuary of the people in their captivity? First of all by sending the prophet himself, . . . a preacher of repentance and salvation, and one so richly endowed. . . . That which made the temple itself into a temple, the presence of God, dwelt in him. Again, He proved this by the outward protection which He afforded them, . . . by inward consolations, &c. Every event that transpired,—the elevation of Daniel, the fall of the Babylonian and rise of the Persian power,—pointed to this end. How different was the Babylonian exile from that of the present day! In the latter there are no signs of the presence of God. The nation can do nothing but celebrate memorial feasts and dream of the future" (*Heng.*)

"The dispersion, besides being a just chastisement on account of sin, and a salutary discipline to lead the heart of the people back to God, had an important end to accomplish as a preparatory movement in providence for opening the way for Messiah's kingdom. It was very far from being an unmixed evil. It was of great service in diffusing

the knowledge of God, and providing materials for the first foundations of the Christian Church. But it was still more important and necessary in spiritualising the views of the Jews, and training to the knowledge and service of God without the help of a material temple. The devout worshipper at Babylon, Alexandria, Rome, found himself a partaker of God's presence and blessing. What a mighty advance did the kingdom of God thus make toward the possession of the world! And the Lord manifested His power to overrule a present evil for the accomplishment of an ultimate good" (*Fairbairn*).

Vers. 17, 18. A reply to the assertion of men of Jerusalem that the land was their exclusive possession. "**Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, and,**" besides being a sanctuary, "**I will gather you and give to you the territory of Israel**; but the restoration will not be to the state of things which existed prior to the exile; "**and they,**" whom the Lord thus favours, "**come thither and take away all its detestable things and all its abominations therefrom;**" first of all they cease to do the evil things which had provoked their Almighty King; they no longer halt between the Lord and Baalim. But "that they have eschewed idolatry ever since their return from Babylon," is a statement to be qualified by the remarks of Hengstenberg. "That Satan should drive out Satan, or a refined system of idolatry (even Jehovah can become an idol) make war upon one of a grosser kind, is a matter of no religious importance. It is also evident that the outward removal of idols, in the period immediately following the restoration and in the time of the Maccabees, is included in the prophecy only so far as God Himself was the *principium movens* on those occasions. But this can be regarded as only a very small beginning. If the idols had all been banished from the country along with the idolatrous images, the people would have had some ground for charging God with unfaithfulness in not performing His promises. The external removal of the things, by which the land of the Lord had been defiled, was thought of by the prophet only so far as it was the result of the unconditional surrender of the heart to the Lord."

Vers. 19, 20. "**And I give them one heart,**" a heart in which will, thought, feeling are in unison, and which finds itself in harmony with other hearts. The method by which this grace will be brought about is the Lord's; "**and a new spirit will I put within you,**" "the same for substance, but altered in the frame, renewed in the qualities thereof" (*Trapp*); "**and I will take away the heart of stone from their flesh, and give them an heart of flesh.**" "There is generally more said than ought to be said according to God's word, that 'in its natural state man's heart' *is* 'hard as a stone.' It becomes the heart of stone only by hardening. By nature it is rather 'an heart of flesh,' which grace confronts with spirit of Spirit (John iii. 6). With the fleshy state of the heart manifold gifts of God are conceivable, as was the case of Israel from their fathers (hereditary blessings). The New Testament interpretation must not, as a matter of course, be put upon vers. 19 and 20. In comparison with the stony heart which God's judgments broke in pieces, this was to be an heart of flesh; but yet it was merely an heart of flesh. The heart of stone stands in relation to the idols, so the heart of flesh, the new spirit, the one heart, stands in relation to the only true God. The keeping apart of flesh and stone is as important as that of flesh and spirit" (*Lange*). Israel had gone into a position that was unnatural to it, but was to return, by divine working, into that which was natural, "**that they may walk in My statutes, and keep My judgments, and do them,**" &c.

Ver. 21. The promise is accompanied with a dark shadow. Whosoever there be "**whose heart goes after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations,**" who continue a devotion full of interest in the idols which their evil hearts attach themselves to, they shall reap the fruit of their own ways. If the idols represent merely illusions, yet they exercise a mastering sway over

individuals, while the full nature of sin is manifested by their worship. "What power has Mammon now, as a national god, over Jewish minds, although he is in himself a mere shadow!" (*Heng.*) "The moral bearings of the Lord's statement fasten on every man his own responsibility for his own conduct. Mercy to a people does not shut off personal agency." "The promise of a return to Canaan was not given to the exiles as an absolute and unconditional good. And comparing the promise of what should have been, with the record of what actually was, we find that the word received but a partial fulfilment, and Canaan as occupied by the restored remnant was not a region of holiness. Still the promise did not fail; the Lord did provide for Himself a spiritual offspring from the captivity, and plant them anew as a seed of blessing in the land of their fathers—enough to furnish a pledge that the sum of all promise, the work of reconciliation in Christ, would, in due time, be brought to completion" (*Fairbairn*).

HOMILETICS.

The Appeal of Religion to the Feelings.

There had been a general deterioration in the life of the Jewish people. Religion was corrupted into superstition, and all that was purifying and rightening in it got rid of. Then, as a matter of course, their morals became depraved, and then came political degradation and national ruin. In their hopeless plight as exiles, what was it that they really needed?

The answer cannot be far to seek. The spirit of revolt had been stirred up against the power which dominated them. Of what use had that been? If God should intervene by some wonderful "providence," and with a strong arm bring them out of Chaldea and restore them to their own land, of what avail could even that be? If the same people, animated by the same spirit, had been all reinstated in their properties possessed before, what would have been gained? The one essential thing of all was for the men and women, the young men and maidens, to love and choose right and good—be obedient to God, and righteous and loving toward one another; for, if the inmost character of the people remained unchanged, the same wretched consequences would once more follow. To try this experiment over again would simply have been waste of time and waste of everything. A corrupt and bad nation can never be for long a prosperous nation. Evil still clings to it, and will produce its own fruits of course. So it would have been utterly vain to have shown a false compassion to them and brought them back from captivity just as they were.

The promise of renewed prosperity is here made dependent on renewed rightness. The religious promise is the grand and basal one (ver. 20). The people must become a right people, must have a right heart and a new spirit, or prosperity is out of the question. The national character is the main thing to be looked to if a people would enjoy national welfare. "Righteousness exalteth a nation." If the love of righteousness be general and strong, that will purge the eyesight of a people, and they will see what they ought to do. All those members of a nation who sap the robust righteousness of the people; all those who countenance and promote the neglect of religion, who weaken the faith of others in God, who lessen reverence and piety, by word or deed or by the power of example, are helping to undermine the national well-being. While all who help righteousness, truth, goodness, the fear of God, and the love of men, are doing best for their country's stability and progress. In order to the accomplishment of such a result, there must be a heart renovated by religion. And so we learn that the very core of this true religion is a power over the heart. As the heart

stands principally for the feelings, we may say that religion is chiefly having the feelings right.

Religion is made by many a quite outward affair, one of rites and ceremonies and observances. With others a correct religious creed is everything, and not a few weed their creed of all positive statements and reduce it to negatives—to denying this, and contradicting that, and arguing against the other. These are in great danger of making religion consist in notions, *i.e.*, chiefly a matter of intellect.

The intellect and the feelings are often put in opposition; but it ought not to be so. The use of the intellect in religion is to help the heart. We want both brought into the highest condition of health and vigour. It is ever bad to divorce them, and undesirable to cultivate one at the expense of the other. But if we were obliged to confine ourselves, then there is no question the heart, the feeling, must have the vast pre-eminence. The understanding is addressed in Scripture as the way to the conscience and the heart. Right knowledge is good even for its own sake; but if it be alone, a man may be a devil. Intellect without love is one definition of the devil.

Why are the feelings of this importance in religion?

I. Because they govern the man. A man may love to flatter himself that he is governed by his intellect, by pure reason. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he is governed by his feelings, by his inclinations, by his likings, and then he calls in reason! He employs his intellect to find him useful arguments by which he may vindicate himself to himself and to others!

> "The afterthoughts
> Which reason coins to justify excess
> And passion's disappointment."

It was the feelings which impelled John and Peter, Martha and Mary, to Christ; which made Annas and Caiaphas seek His death; it was a certain class of feelings which urged Judas to betray Him. So now. Some men love the Revealer and believe in Him; they find the evidences which they ask for satisfactory, and may be able to give a reason to others. Some do not love that Life which claims to be divine, it rebukes their life too much; they scan the evidences and find them insufficient, and are glad to be able to say so. The feelings are seen to be supreme as the active power in human life. Hence God seeks to enlist them on the side of righteousness, and has so put Truth—embodied it in a person—as to make right affections possible and easy. Therefore, "Thou *shalt* love the Lord thy God," &c. "Lovest thou *Me?*"

II. Because the feelings form a ground common to all men on which religion can act. With many the intellect is very feeble, and only the fewest can have a well-furnished and well-disciplined intellect. But all can have strong feelings, strong likings and dislikings. Ought not religion to be an affair of that on which all classes can stand on pretty equal terms? The feelings enlisted, what is too hard in any rank of life?

III. Because the feelings decide the character. A man is what his chief love or liking is, what his allowed and cherished feelings are. As he thinketh in his heart, so is he. And Christ is the supreme test. For there is, in happiest proportions, all goodness embodied in His life which has special claims on men. If the feelings towards Him are those of indifference, unconcern, to say nothing of opposition, then is the heart a heart of stone indeed; and the one first and great need for such a man is to get rid of his heart of stone and acquire a heart of flesh.

We see how wisely God has made religion to be primarily an affair of the heart and not of the intellect. We recognise the pains He hath taken to win the heart for the right, to awaken and stimulate and direct the feelings. This is to a great extent the *rationale* of the Gospel, the logic of Christianity. We are interested to

see how the promise of one heart was fulfilled to the captives as represented in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Important also to see how the matter bears on us (2 Cor. vi. 17, vii. 1).

Counsel and promise meet here. We are to get the heart of flesh of ourselves, God will give it to us. Both needed. He will give; we must concur. If we prize the promise, we shall do all we can to get rid of one kind of heart and to obtain the other. How many means are found to be provided; how many things, habits, &c., to be sedulously avoided, and others to be sedulously observed. If you will try honestly to make you a heart of flesh, God will command success, will secure the result.—*H. H. D.*

God the Sanctuary of the Afflicted (ver. 16).

There is a tendency in nature and providence to keep things in a kind of equality. There are compensations. In what condition can we be found that possesses no advantages? Let us consider from this verse—

I. **The calamity.** "I have cast them off," &c. The event serves to display—

1. *The agency of God.* He asserts His dominion and influence over all the sufferings of nations, families, and individuals. An irreligious mind is detained from God by the persons or events which injure Him. A pious man can say, "It is the Lord." He acts by the intervention of means. He did not carry away the Jews by miracle, but by the effect of war; and we are not to conclude that God has nothing to do in any work because of the vileness of those who are engaged in it. He makes the very wrath of man to praise Him.

2. *Displays the truth of God.* The evil had been foretold and threatened by successive prophets, and the calamity was identified with the Divine veracity—"Hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"

3. *Displays the holiness of God.* The offences of this people were aggravated by their privileges. Sin is not to be judged of by its grossness, but by its guilt. No wonder that He punished the Jews.

4. *Displays the wisdom of God.* By their dispersion they were in "the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord."

5. *Displays His goodness.* He punished not to destroy, but reform. Their captivity was limited in duration, and He did not leave them comfortless in the meantime.

II. **The alleviation.** "Yet will I be to them," &c. He engages to be to them a temple, so that He should be found of them, and they would see His power and glory. He compensates them for the want of those very things which seem essential to their welfare.

1. *In the loss of outward comforts.* He does not require us to be indifferent to substance, health, friends; but as He is the unchangeable and all-sufficient, we have a security independent of the world, diseases, associates. At first we may murmur when affliction comes, but it is to wean us from creatures and draw to trust in the living God. How many can bear witness that He has made that condition comfortable which they once deemed insupportable, and that the joy of salvation and the comforts of the Holy Ghost are effectual substitutes for every deficiency in creature good!

2. *In the want of gracious ordinances.* God will never countenance the neglect of the means of grace; but He will make up for the want of them. When we cannot follow Him, He can follow us. The superstitious should remember this as well as the afflicted. He can meet with His people in any place, and wherever H holds communion with them the place becomes sacred.

What a place, then, is heaven! What a *natural* world must that be where there is needed no light of the sun! What a *moral* world, where we can dispense with

Sabbaths, with preaching, with temples! Even religion will cease there, and only the dispositions it formed and the state to which it led remain.

What a being, then, is God! He enables us to live a life of dependence upon Him and communion with Him. No want but He can relieve, no hope but He can accomplish. He is accessible by Christ. Let us come to Him, and say, "I am continually with Thee," &c.—(*Jay*, abridged.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 22, 23. With the promise of good to the exiled Jews the vision immediately draws to its close. The cherubim and their associated wheels (chap. x. 16, 17) underneath the divine glory prepare to move away. "**And the glory of the Lord rose up from the midst of the city:**" it had been resting at the gate opening to the city (chap. x. 4)—considered to be its central point—now it will leave entirely the temple and its precincts, as also the city, "**and make a stand over the mount, which is to the east of the city**"—the Mount of Olives, commanding an outlook over all Jerusalem. There it waited, betokening that the city was no longer defended by the Lord—a defence was no more upon all the glory—and when Ezekiel had traced thus far its movements, he felt himself withdrawn from any further sight of it. "The rabbis, commenting on this passage, said that the Shechinah retired eastward to the Mount of Olives, and there for three years called in vain to the people with human voice that they should repent" (*Speaker's Com.*) On this mount Jesus wept, and predicted the second overthrow of Jerusalem (see xix. 21; Matt. xxiv. 3); from it He went up into heaven (see xxiv. 5; Acts i. 12); and Zechariah prophesied (chap. xiv. 4) that on it the Lord shall stand to fight against hostile nations, and bring blessings to His own. What Ezekiel saw "was a withdrawal of the divine glory, and yet a continuance of it in the neighbourhood." Jehovah's external protection and blessing may have been withdrawn, but still the invisible power of the Spirit will remain near them, and probably manifest itself the more gloriously on that account. It is Ezekiel who has discerned, set forth, and described in the most touching manner the quickening and awakening power of the Spirit of Jehovah on the whole people (see xxxvii.) In a similar way Jesus, in whom the divine glory resides bodily, withdraws Himself from the Jews (John viii. 21); but His standing on the Mount of Olives, on the east side of Jerusalem, is a sign that, though invisible, He is still near to bless them (Acts iii. 26). —*Baumgarten.*

Vers. 24 and 25. The same force which had rapt the seer away brings him back to a consciousness of the presence of the elders in his house in Chaldea. "**And I spake to the exiles all the words of the Lord which He had made me see.**" The elders did not see the visionary journey on which Ezekiel had been taken; but probably they had observed an "astonished" appearance, as if he were absent in mind, and so they were the more susceptible to the report he gave of the revelation in a vision, not of his own heart, but in a striking degree from Him with whom all words are acts. Ezekiel had been called to be a prophet to the exiles (chap. ii. 5), urged to be an instructor as to right and wrong (iii. 17), and under poignant feelings had taken the place of a mediator (xi. 15). These several positions had been defined by visions of a glory infinitely surpassing all Levitical symbols, and which assured him that the Lord was not confined to the locality of the temple, or worshipped only by its forms. Thus, though he could not serve as priest in the ritual of the temple at Jerusalem, he could do that which was more than an equivalent; he could be the medium of declaring to the banished Jews that the Holiest would be present with them; maintain intercourse with them without the instituted sacrifices and offerings, notwithstanding that they were in "the

wilderness of the nations," and were sometimes proud and reviling, sometimes cast down and despairing; and prepare them for the future constitution of their life as a community in the land promised to their fathers, so as to accomplish the original and prospective vocation of Israel. The exiles, however, needed much teaching before they could be fit for their destiny, and in that teaching the further prophesying of Ezekiel will hold no little share.

HOMILETICS.

A Departing God (vers. 22, 23).

The movement of the appearance which Ezekiel had the eyes of his understanding opened to see signifies—

I. That God is not bound to any place or form of worship. He would remove from the sacred city to the idolatrous Chaldea; from the prescribed forms of Levitical service to the free forms of hearts prompted by need. There is no land, no denomination, no single church, which has a monopoly of His power and grace. He may have dwelt amongst them so that they beheld His glory; but if they forsake His laws they forfeit His presence. They may retain the name of Christian, keep up cathedrals and chapels, use prayer-book and hymn-book, acknowledge articles, confessions, declarations, and the glory and power have gone from them all; and, alas! many of the people never suspect that so it is.

II. That He does not remove all at once. He may go with His power and glory to another land, denomination, church, regarded as poor and despised, but in which souls humble themselves under His mighty hand, and spread His great goodness. Yet He does not hastily leave the scene where once He had manifested Himself. He goes to the threshold before going out, and when He goes out, He does not go out of sight. He waits near, within reach of a cry, if so be that before the night falls, which results from His departure, men may call and He will answer them.

When God has departed, formality, temptation to go into deeper darkness, reproach to His name, all follow; and what shall the end of these things be? "Let us see that we do not, by a careless and inconsistent walk, provoke Him to withdraw His invisible and spiritual presence from us." In fear of such a state let us say—

"Take anything Thou wilt away,
But go not Thou away!"

Returning from the Presence (vers. 24, 25).

"The vision that I had seen went up from me." "Jacob seeth a ladder reaching up to heaven, angels ascending and descending, and the Lord at the top of the ladder, but this was only for a night; Moses saw the Lord in the burning bush, but the sight lasted not; Peter, James, and John saw the transfiguration of Christ, but the vision went up from them." They who strive faithfully to follow Jesus come into seasons of a clear shining of His face. They may not have gone back from His footprints, they may not have lost a sense of their dependence on Him, and have not failed to recognise His abiding nearness; but seasons arrive in which the vapour and dust hanging over their daily pathway thin exceedingly. More vivid is their consciousness of the grace and glory and truth manifested in God in Christ. Fresh hope, joy, peace, vigour, enter; they realise that there are possibilities of insight for their spiritual life transcending all they ask or think. They would not care to say, "My willing soul would stay in such a frame as this," &c. They do wish to understand the lessons of such upliftings.

I. They find them variable. *The visions are diverse.* Always pervaded by Christ, sometimes one of His aspects, sometimes another, is most impressive, yet His glory illuminates one and all.

They are transitory. They are drinks from the brook in the way. The sparkle and coolness go, transmuted into recruited strength and hope. We may often regret that such experiences pass away. Perhaps we charge ourselves with a fault as having occasioned their disappearance. But that may be an error. For our hearts are not framed so as to sustain a prolonged unchanging feeling. That would be insanity. We must calculate on "frames and feelings" reviving and decaying, on our turning from communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ to communing, it may be, with elders or juniors, with fellow-sufferers in the conflicts of life, and still, through all our moods, have our feet set upon a rock and our goings established.

II. They find they have furthered insight. "In Thy light we see light." *The sense of God deepened the sense of sin.* The chief who, in days before Christ, exclaimed, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself;" the apostle who, in the presence of Christ, cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;" the seer who, in days after Christ, fell as one dead at the feet of the manifested living Lord, are examples of the effect of the realised presence of the All Holy upon the heart of mankind. We hear then what we had not expected to hear about evil. We see then the irrefragable penalty inflicted on persistent unrighteousness.

The sense of God inspires hope. His Word declares that He is full of compassion and gracious, that He looks to the man who is of a poor and contrite spirit and trembles at His word, that a Deliverer comes from Him to turn from ungodliness, and that after we have suffered for a while we shall be established, strengthened, settled. A nearer fellowship with the Unseen thus affecting us, we come away lowlier than before, but more confident that God has prepared things unspeakable for them that love Him.

III. They find themselves emboldened to act for God. Men lifted by the Spirit of God see and believe in His thoughts and ways. Then, when their souls are irradiated and strengthened, they are enabled to tell the things of death and life without fear and without reserving one needed truth. Such men will never be feeble servants to their fellow-men. The kind of saplessness manifested by certain professed Christians, and which has given force to the somewhat cynical term "goodiness," rises out of faulty ways of hearing the voice of the Son of God. Let us be bold for the truth and love of Jesus, and we shall be known as having been "with Jesus." If truth and love impel us to shatter the hopes of a life, to fling the solemn accusation, "Thou art the man," to affirm, when the storms of trial are beating down and washing over the sailors on life's heaving sea, that there is nothing to fear, nothing really evil where Christ manifests Himself to be with us, then we must seek grace for each diverse duty from a clearer sight of the glory and grace of the Christ of God. He will enable us for whatever ministry He calls us to, we shall declare all that He shows to us for others, adding nought, subtracting nought, and be qualified by His presence in a way which no rules and no resolutions are capable of accomplishing.

Let Christians be ready for every approach of the Spirit to carry them to a more conscious apprehension of "the glory of God in the face of Jesus;" then they will make, and only then, good and faithful servants. They will return from His presence "strengthened with all might in the inner man."

2. Fuller Details relating to the Sins of the People and their Punishment (Chaps. xii.–xix).

Intercourse with their countrymen in Jerusalem deeply affected the views and hopes of the exiled Jews, as the feelings and expectations in British colonies are affected by the discussions and decisions in the mother-country. The kingdom of Judah still maintained its existence, notwithstanding the prophetic threatenings of Jeremiah. That gave apparent denial to his dismal prediction, and a bold, defiant attitude was assumed respecting them. The captivity took the cue from this, and the vision of the Holy City, its abominations and departed glory, by which Ezekiel had intimated to his hearers the utter ruin of the Jewish state, found no belief among them. The training through which God was taking them required that this state of mind should be mastered. A true view of their guilt and their dependence on the Law could not be arrived at except as illusions were dissipated. Ezekiel is therefore entrusted with further messages, both for Judah and the captivity, exposing the fatuity of all suppositions that the calamity denounced could be averted. "The prophet is inexhaustible in the announcement of this, as the false patriotism was inexhaustible in its announcements of salvation."—*Heng.*

(1.) Symbol and Interpretation of the King's Flight (Chap. xii. 1–16).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 1–3. Ezekiel has to do that which must excite public attention at Tel-Abib, but the primary application of his action is to Jerusalem, and so secondarily to the captives. He is not to scruple to carry out palpable and strange movements or to refrain from prophesying as he has done before, because he has to speak to a people who, with capacities for learning, are too perverse to learn (ver. 3). "**And thou, son of man, make thee utensils of captivity,**" a phrase found in Jer. xlvi. 19 (marginal rendering), and there and here signifying such few things as could be taken into the unfriendly and hard conditions of exile. "**And remove [as a captive] by day before their eyes.**" In broad daylight he was to gather his articles and carry them out of his house, thus making secure of the observation of his neighbours. "**And thou shalt remove [as a captive] from thy place to another place before their eyes, perhaps they will see,**" but it is not likely: their disposition evokes the refrain, "**for they are an house of rebelliousness.**"

Vers. 4–6. Though the articles were brought out, they were left while daylight lasted. At its departure, but before total darkness came on, Ezekiel was to act again; "**and thou shalt go forth in the evening before their eyes;**" in some way which would clearly appear to be that of a captive, "**as the goings forth of a captivity.**" He was to proceed furtively, while they were looking on. "**Before their eyes dig through the wall, and go forth by it**"—by the opening thus made (ver. 6). In full view of the people, "**upon thy shoulder shalt thou lift;**" but by the time he had digged through night had fallen, such as fell over Abram (Gen. xv. 17, cf. 12), and so "**in the darkness thou shalt go forth; thy face thou shalt cover,**' as one who does not wish to be recognised, "**and not see the earth.**" Thes proceedings were intended to represent very ominous incidents, "**for a wonder-sign I give thee to the house of Israel.**" There was nothing in Ezekiel's own surroundings which required this course of action, but it was typical of the fate of King Zedekiah. As yet prosperous, the inhabitants of Jerusalem rashly assumed that his kingdom would continue; but events were preparing which would prove the utter futility of trusting such a shaken reed.

Vers. 7–16 Ezekiel fulfilled his

instructions to the letter, and on the following morning received, in plain terms, an explanation of what he had been doing. He was thus put in a position to answer the curiosity of the people as to what was meant, and with painful distinctness describes the disasters which were to befall the realm (ver. 10). "**Say thou unto them, The prince is this lifting up in Jerusalem,**" *i.e.*, this taking up on my shoulder is a lesson, the prophetic burden which refers to him who occupies the throne in Jerusalem—he must remove as a captive. It refers also "**to all the house of Israel that are among them;**" both the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the members of the ten tribes who have joined themselves to their brethren the Jews will be involved in the same calamity. By this sign also the exiled were informed that if they were envious of the lot of those who still remained in Judea that was a groundless feeling, because the latter also would suffer exile (ver. 13). Further details than those found in the symbolic action are given. "**And I spread my net over him;**" the Lord will, by means of the Chaldean army, catch the prince in meshes, and his escape will be prevented; "**And I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans;**" yet, in a manner which the event alone can explain, "**he shall not see it though he shall die there**" (2 Kings xxv. 1–7, and Jer. lii. 1–11). Ver. 14. All his friends, all his forces, "**I will scatter toward every wind of heaven, and a sword I draw out after them.**" They would not all perish; "**I leave over of them men of number,**" men who can be easily counted; and it is done to this end, "**that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen among whom they come;**" their recitals would explain that it was not weakness on the part of the God of Israel which had occasioned the distress and subjection of His people, but their offences against His holy laws. His unfaltering purpose is that "**they know that I am the Lord.**" Human foresight might have signified that the king and people of Jerusalem would be mastered by the Chaldeans, but that the king should flee from the city by night, be caught in his attempt, be taken to Babylon after his eyes had been put out, could not have been forecast by any mere human intelligence, except as the intelligence was enlightened by the God who seeth all events that are to come.

Josephus (*Antiq.* x. 7) reports that an account of this prophetic action and its explanation was sent to Zedekiah, but that he, on comparing it with the danger which Jeremiah had warned him of, found that the latter said that he should be carried to Babylon, while Ezekiel said that he should not see it. The discrepancy was so glaring in the king's view that he concluded, not that one was right and the other wrong, but that both were false! "In this he but showed the captious disposition of superficial inquirers and shallow unbelievers of all ages, who no sooner discover some obvious difficulties on the surface of Revelation than they conclude the whole to be a cunningly devised fable, or treat it as unworthy of their serious consideration. Would they but search a little deeper, and survey, in a spirit of impartiality, the entire field of Revelation, they would find that the things which at first stagger their belief disappear on closer inspection, or remain only as difficulties inseparable from communications which bear respect to the character and purposes of Godhead."—*Fairbairn.*

HOMILETICS.

Some Aspects under which God Communicates with Men (vers. 1–16).

Taking for granted—that which both human history and experience bear witness to—not only that God is able to communicate with man, but also that

man is capable of receiving His communications, we are presented here with certain features of that process.

I. It is carried on with a clear view of all human conditions. It could not be otherwise, because He is God and not man. He has respect (1.) *to all with whom He may enter into communication.* The king is not too exalted for His message; nor are the princes. Soldiers are open to Him and every member of a quiet habitation. It can be said, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me." (2.) *To their preparedness for His communications.* They have faculties to apprehend all truth that He may impart. Eyes have they to see, and ears have they to hear, and He wants to bring the faculties for seeing and hearing into use. He well knows that eyes may be used for selfish interests, and not for the things that are unseen and eternal, that ears hear the enticements of the flesh and lies of deceiving prophets, but do not listen to the just and holy and good commandment, giving knowledge of sin and need of the righteousness of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Thus He estimates the power of all forces that are favourable or opposed to His aims. (3.) *To the possibility of mastering men's indisposition.* Whatever may be the blindness or deafness exhibited in regard to the wisdom and truth and love of God's words, He still acts in hope of a change. "It may be they will consider though they be a rebellious house." His graciousness is a perennial spring for parched and hardened hearts. In New Testament as in Old Testament times, with us as with the Jews, He is "long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The Israelites of Ezekiel's day are illustrations of what the Word of the Lord encounters in most of those to whom it is sent; they are its hearers but not its doers, and punishment is impending over them. The Lord's treatment of them is a type of His riches of mercy, which leaves no means untried, and would hope against hope. "The mirror of human perversity is at the same time the mirror of divine grace."

II. It proceeds by stages. (1.) *They are varied in appearance.* Actions are alone at one time; at another they are followed by words. Common and uncommon things are summoned in order to impress His thoughts and ways. It would be quite unfair to argue from these grotesque proceedings of Ezekiel, that any methods, however outlandish, may be pursued in order to secure men's attention to spiritual facts. The method should be such as will impress a truth, not such as may excite little else but wonder or amusement or sympathy. Under such a restriction and by the pressure of divine leading, symbolical actions may first be used, and instruction follow after them; but it ought ever to be realised that no action, even though it may be apparently impressive, is of any worth in God's judgment unless it end in making men know that He is Lord. (2.) *Constant in progress.* So it seems to us, and so it is, only we sometimes conclude that God is in a hurry when He is not. The suffering which looks as if it had burst suddenly upon a people or an individual is the result of preceding events which may have been occurring through some, it may be many, years. The destruction of the plain of Sodom in a morning was physically the outcome of material forces which had been long in gathering and pent up, and was, morally, the final consequence of lengthened and high-handed wickedness. This incident in Ezekiel's history shows how God lets the minds of prophet and people simmer till morning over the odd conduct of the prophet on the day and night before. Then He explained what was in prospect; but the event, which the action referred to, was not brought to pass till about six years had gone away. God gives line upon line, precept upon precept, before the guilty fall backward and are broken and are snared and taken. The apostle who "ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" was a pupil of God, who is full of compassion. Does His goodness and forbearance lead us to repentance? Have we the love which suffers long

and is kind? (2.) *Culminating in acknowledgment of Him.* As Ruler over all He makes the end of His revelations of Himself to be that "all should know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." He has the right to supreme homage, and He will arrange to spare some of those who have felt the consequences of withholding that homage, so that they shall speak of what He has done. They will make known His deeds among the people, and the heathen shall fear His great and terrible name. Thus shall His way be known upon earth; His saving health among all nations.

THE TIME OF GOD'S COMMUNICATION IS WORTHY TO BE NOTED (ver. 8).

I. Because the coming of the Word of the Lord to us is an important event in our history. (1.) *Sometimes it produces terror and conviction of evil.* Moses on Sinai, Job under the whirlwind, Saul near to Damascus. We are to be brought to see our need. (2.) *Sometimes it is attractive and tender.* As to Samuel when a youth, and to Lydia when Paul preached. (3.) *Sometimes it is for consolation.* As the still small voice to Elijah when he was cast down, with its, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" And as Christ came to the disciples on the lake with His, "It is I." (4.) *Sometimes to unfold and urge to duty.* As to Ezekiel here, and as to Paul when he was praying in the temple in a trance.

II. Because it comes at a noticeable season. "In the morning." God regards the time we have been under His teachings, what our attitude to Him has been, and how we have profited, or the reverse. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?" (1.) *The word may come in the morning, literally.* Give God your first thoughts, meditate early on His ways; "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord," and let us say, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." (2.) *In the period of youth.* Samuel, Josiah, Timothy. Good to begin well, in hope of ending well. "Wilt Thou not cry unto me, My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth?" (3.) *After a period of anxiety and suffering.* "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Martha said to Mary, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." "Pay thy vows." "Arise, go to Bethel, and make there an altar unto God, that appeared to thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother."

Let us look for the day when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and come forth from their graves.

(2.) THE SYMBOL FROM BREAD AND WATER (vers. 17–20).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The prophet is commanded to take his ordinary meals as a man under great apprehensions. It is not, as in chap. iv. 16, that he is thus to indicate a dreadful scarcity approaching, but rather the felt pressure of that calamity, as if the evil threatened would take away all relish for sustenance to the body (ver. 18). Ezekiel speaks in the Word of the Lord "**of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, in the country of Israel;**" a message is to be forwarded to the people who had not been carried into captivity, to declare that they should be affected with anxiety and surprise, "**because its land,**" *i.e.*, ferusalenis, "**becomes desolate from its fulness;**" where once were life and plenty, the supply of population, animals, grain, &c., would be grievously and surprisingly diminished.

HOMILETICS.

(Vers. 17–20.)

When the evil consequences of sins have to be encountered then there may be trouble.

I. On men. 1. An apparently foolish course may be appointed by the Lord, but "the foolishness of God is wiser than men." 2. Hard service may have to be undertaken for the gracious Master, but "most gladly will I glory in infirmities if the power of Christ rest upon me."

II. On the necessaries of life. Supplies for the body may become not sources of comfort but of suffering. Food and drink shall cause a strain and pain. The bread be bread of affliction.

III. On population, agriculture, commerce. Depression and decrease ensue. A nation no more than an individual can escape from the due reward of its deeds.

(3.) The Foolish Proverb (vers. 21–28).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The hearts of the Jerusalem people would evade any fair application of the ominous action of Ezekiel, and he is incited to aim a blow at the evasion, which took form in a proverbial saying, ver. 22, "**The days are prolonged, and every vision perisheth,**" time is going by, and not one forecast of good or evil has come to pass; it has been a deluding of us. Ver. 23. Against this sentiment the communication from the Lord is, "**The days are near, and the word of every vision,**" the passing days are inevitably bringing on the speedy fulfilment of every word folded in the imagery which has been perceived by the spiritual vision of the prophets. Ver. 25. Over against the merely human prophecies, which had largely contributed to the formation of the condemned proverb, the divine truthfulness would be manifested, and utterly dislodge the former, "**For I, the Lord, will speak whatever word I will speak, and it shall come to pass,**" not in some far-off future, but "**in your days, O house of rebellion.**" On the generation of his contemporaries would come both the earlier and the later effects which had been declared certain.

Vers. 26–28. An emphatic assertion of the impending accomplishment of Ezekiel's own prophetic utterances is made against the temporising of "**the house of Israel, who say the vision that he seeth is for many days, and for far off times he prophesieth.**" They believed his words would come true, but not in their experience at any rate. To meet that idea of postponement the Lord said, "**None of my words shall be delayed any more; whatever word I shall speak, it shall come to pass.**"

HOMILEITICS.

Men's Evasion of the Divine Interference in Events.

God does not only begin, He goes along with the whole development of the world's history. He can foretell any portion of that history. By special communication or general providence He proves that all its "government is upon His shoulders;" that "He sitteth on the throne judging right," and working so that men should cease to do evil and learn to do well. There is that in human nature which reaches a point at which it resiles from the idea of this immanence, where it finds the absolute rights of God unwelcome to itself. In this state we observe—

I. The power exerted by what is visible. "Prophets and preachers are men like yourselves. Why should you yield up your souls that they may rid over them with what they assert are messages from an invisible mighty Being. What palpable proofs can they give that He communicates with them, though He never does with you? You might accept their statements did you see any clear fulfilment of the threats of punishment which they plentifully cast forth; but in failure of such evidence you have reason to make light of the claims which they advance for the recognition of the truth of what they say." How shall these difficulties be overcome? "Let what is righteous and true and holy and good get an honest hearing in your consciences. Let the operation of principles, which is so much more slow to become obvious than the operation of the physical forces, have due time accorded; you will be brought to see that your craving for what is sensible is a depreciation of that nobler part of your nature which feels after higher things than it sees. You may be convinced if what is spiritual commends itself by its close adherence to rectitude, you are wrong in ignoring or postponing its indications." How many hearers of the Word of God will not accept Jesus Christ as Lord, because they expect some more palpable influences to be brought into action! Do not portions of modern society indicate doubt and even aversion to the demands of the Bible, because they do not place themselves in the light of what is sinless and just and unbending to worldly pleasures? Thus space given for repentance is too often turned into space for hardening the heart against the Unseen and Eternal.

II. Doubts of the efficiency of God. They may acknowledge Him as Maker of the undeveloped world, but decline to acknowledge the signs that He is acting in it now. They see force of one kind or other, and as these forces always act in uniform lines, what place is there for a holy will behind and before and upon men in every event? So the thought is, There is no God in the common acceptation of the term. There may be a power that is unique, but it does not interfere in human affairs as prophets and preachers maintain. There is no reality expressed by the words, The God of Abraham and of Israel, of Jesus Christ and His Church. Is it forgotten by such thinkers that the nature of God must be expressed in words and acts corresponding to itself; that He must abide and must operate age after age; that whatever be the superficial sameness of society and slumbering of retributions, He has not forgotten the work of His hands? "I say the word and will perform it."

III. Discredit cast upon personal application of divine messages. In this class it is not said, There is no prospect of the evil threatened ever coming near; but rather, There is no likelihood of it touching us. "When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come nigh unto us." Men who have committed iniquity for years do so with impunity, nations which have been selfish and oppressive have not been subjected to penalties, notwithstanding what men speaking in the name of the Lord say. We may believe that not in our days are their words to be practically illustrated. *Thus is produced a feeling of security*, if not of unbelief. The heart is set towards putting far off the evil day. It is a token of deepest immersion in spiritual darkness when men take the apparent absence of a frowning face as proof that God's servants are not justified in saying that it is there. It would be seen if darkness did not blind the eyes. *The feeling is widespread.* The darkness covered the mass of Israel. It affects and will affect multitudes in these later days. "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" What need to question all our spiritual security to see whether it results from trust in God, or from a vague idea that we shall escape portending ill, that if others are to be sufferers for sin we shall not be!

1. Common sayings are not always true sayings. They may pass current in houses, shops, meetings, but when they have to stand a cross-examination

how many utterly break down and show themselves to be bubbles—baseless and hollow.

2. God's sayings are certain. He has spoken them in the constitution of man and that of the world, as well as also by holy men commissioned to declare His will. However prolonged the working out of His institutes be, they must develop fully and finally. He has eternity to act in. See that faith is placed in Christ Jesus, who gives insight of the thoughts and ways—the love and the wrath of God the Holy and True. We receive "a kingdom that cannot be moved, and serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

3. The preference of man's sayings may hasten the manifestation of the truth of God's sayings. The boldness and mockery of deniers of God's claims may make Him to become a swift witness for His veracity and against men's despisal of it. Men who taunt Him to "make speed, hasten His word that we may see it," may find, in the midst of sorrows, that they have brought upon themselves swift destruction. Repentance may prevent judgment; hardening of heart aggravates and expedites it. In the Lord alone is there sufficient to assure us that He will not forget, delay, change.

(4.) Of False Prophets and Prophetesses (Chap. xiii.)

Condemnation of the Prophets (vers. 1–16).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The declaration in xii. 24 was that unsubstantiated and delusive prophecy should cease by the fulfilment of the true, and in this chapter a description and denunciation of the former are given. The men and women who had taken upon themselves to announce "salvation without repentance, grace without judgment," were found both in Judea and among the captive Jews. The utterance of Ezekiel is akin to that of Jeremiah (chap. xxiii.). Both indicate that the wishes of the people framed a mould for conclusions as to the will of the Lord. They made the prophets they believed in.

Vers. 1–7 describe the characteristics of the unauthorised prophets. Ver. 2. Ezekiel is enjoined to prophecy "**to the prophets of Israel;**" they had popular sympathy and acceptance. The spirit of the age approved of them, although they were "**prophets out of their own hearts.**" They might sincerely hold what they said as true, but their words were nothing except the products of their imaginations; anything but the communications of God. "**Hear the word of the Lord.**" That which they had not within they shall obtain from without, and to their shame. If false representations of God are powerful He will raise up a standard against them.

Ver. 3. They are threatened. "**Woe to the prophets, fools,**" not merely in going where they were not sent, but actually godless men (Ps. xiv. 1), and consequently "**who walk after their own spirit, and that which they have not seen.**" Not by the insight which the Lord gives (Rev. i. 2, 11, &c.) A twofold aspect of a revelation of God is presented. *Its starting-point.* It begins in an impression made on a man's spirit, and is not originated by his own thoughts and fancies. *Its goal.* The statement of truth accordant with God's justice and love. The light of the face of God, not the man's inner light, is to satisfy the calls for guidance in right thoughts and ways. Christ, and not humanity, must be our test of truth.

Ver. 4. "**As foxes among ruins thy prophets, O Israel, are.**" Deserted places are a favourite resort of foxes. "Because of the mountain of Zion which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it" (Lam. v. 18). And those who were counted messengers of the Lord found their sphere of profit in the omens of the desolation of Jerusalem.

Ver. 5. Israel by sins had become exposed to the assaults of divine penalties; but its favoured prophets had acted like unpatriotic cowards in the crisis of danger. "**Ye have not gone up into the breaches, nor made up a wall about the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord.**" The moral and spiritual evils of the people were as gaps in the wall of Jerusalem; but the prophets had done nothing by reproof and personal conduct to urge to repentance and reformation. They had nothing of that self-humiliation and intercession for the guilty which was manifested by Abraham (Gen. xviii. 23–33), Moses (Ex. xxxii. 11–13), Paul (Rom. ix. 3).

Ver. 6. All pseudo-prophets might not be deceiving, but though "**the Lord had not sent them,**" yet "**they hoped to establish the word,**" *i.e.*, they tried to persuade the people that the unsupported promises made to them would be fully realised, with this result alone, that the falsity would be all the more painfully brought home.

Vers. 8–16. Announce the consequences of prophesying without divine impulse. Ver. 8 states that the Lord is **against** the prophets; and ver. 9 intimates three calamities which shall befall them in relation to the new theocratic regime. They shall neither be numbered "**in the council of my people,**" they will not be members of the influential and ruling circle; nor "**be written in the register of the house of Israel,**" they will not be struck out of that roll which has given them a name and place among the citizens of Israel, but they will not be entered into the roll of the Israel which shall arise from the faithful remnant; and the portion which is in exile "**shall not come into the land of Israel**" (ver. 10). The erring prophets had brought condemnation upon themselves, and produced such a state that "**it,**" the people, "**built a wall, and behold, they,**" the prophets, "**coat it with plaster**" (or *whitewash*, Fair., who refers to Paul's indignant charge on the high priest, "Thou whited wall!" Acts xxiii. 3); ministering to the deceptive hopes of the people instead of exposing their worthlessness. The deluding of the prophets would not last (ver. 11). "**It,**" the wall, daubed "**with whited plaster, shall fall**" by means of agencies controlled by God the Lord: the "**rain,**" "**hailstones,**" and "**storm,**" which should be launched against it. Ver. 14 applies the figure to the reality, and threatens the destruction of those who believed a lie. "**I cast it to the ground, and its foundation is laid bare and it falls, and ye are consumed in the midst of it,**" *i.e.* of Jerusalem (comp. Matt. vii. 24–27). Ver. 15. Both deceived and deceivers would be overwhelmed: "**And I will say unto you, The wall is not, and they who coated it are not.**" Ver. 16. Ezekiel rounds off this portion of his utterance with a thrust at "**the prophets of Israel**" who affirmed that they saw "**a vision of peace for her,**" Jerusalem, "**and there is no peace.**"

HOMILETICS.

Misleading Hopes of Freedom from Future Evils.

The Jews entertained delusive hopes regarding the future welfare of their city and land, and observation proves that, where the Gospel is preached in town or country, many hearers indulge in ungrounded trust as to their escape from the judgment of God against their doings. The reasons which are at work to produce this mistake are similar in the present age to those which operated in the past. They are—

I. **Slighting notions as to the evil of sin.** People may neglect to follow a prescribed course of obedience, or may openly take the course which cuts across it; but they are not humbled for so doing. They make up excuses. "I am

not like this publican." "I have a good heart." "I have not done things worthy to suffer destruction." At the base of all wrong thoughts, at the base of all erroneous teachings as to man's position before God, lies a misconception of the guilt of secret or presumptuous sins. All unrighteousness is sin and a gap through which unknown penalty rushes on the guilty.

II. **Listening to one's own wishes.** We do not wish to count ourselves really "miserable sinners," or to look at the signs which show that we are moving down the hellward slopes of sin; so we evade the accusations which the true and faithful witness brings against us. His voice is not heard, or, if we cannot ignore it, we easily suppose that its warnings must be meant for others, not for us. How needful to arm ourselves with the mind which will ask, Am I regulating my convictions by what I wish or by what the Lord wishes? Are the teachings to which I listen such as I like to have, or are they based upon the truth and holiness of God?

III. **Influenced by misguiding teachers.** This influence is exerted *by self-originated doctrines.* They speak from their own heart. They propound and defend opinions grounded on their views of things, and not on the reality. They can evolve worlds, form conscience, do away with all necessity of a living God. They promise smooth things to a people who have a form of godliness. They hide the present damnation of sin under statements which excuse defective and immoral conduct, and its future under explanations which impugn eternal justice. *By plausible help.* They covered over ugly and dangerous inlets of evil, and they seemed safe; but the covering was of too flimsy a kind. It did not show lives lived differently from those of the transgressors. It did not indicate effectual prayer for the people. It did not denounce sin and warn of its impending punishment: or it did so in such general terms that none are convinced that they are the evildoers who are doomed to the overwhelming wrath of Him before whom evil cannot stand. *By their professed authorisation.* They prophesied in the name of the Lord though He knew them not. They had so far regard to God as to believe that they ought to say only what He commanded. They may speak what they think; sincerely suppose that they have right on their side; but they are deceived. They see that which might be perceived to be a lie, thus they buoy up their hearers with false hopes and do untold harm to bodies and souls by their errors.

"Some teach men to expect safety from a comparative decency of moral character; some on account of formal and superstitious observances; some because they belong to an orthodox part of the Church and have got some notions of certain important doctrines; some because of their impressions and enthusiastic reveries; and others even by a direct abuse of the gospel and making Christ the minister of sin. . . . All are alike distant from Christ the true foundation: they build not on Him by a penitent faith that worketh by love, and produceth obedience; they either leave out His merits and atonement, or the work of His new-creating Spirit, or the substantial fruits of righteousness; and in different ways endeavour to varnish, paint and repair the old building, instead of erecting a new one on a new foundation, for 'an habitation of God through the Spirit.'"—W. F.

1. *Judgment will come notwithstanding hopes of escaping it.* Nothing of man can avail to resist it. The daubed wall shall fall and overwhelm misleaders and misled.

2. *Beware lest thou flatter with a trust to hopes of safety which are not drawn from God's will revealed in Christ.* Thou hast the knowledge given of Him. Be true and faithful to Him only.

CONDEMNATION OF THE PROPHETESSES (vers. 17–23).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—A disposition to prophecy was in the air; so women as well as men, in Jerusalem and among the exiles, were influenced by it. Naturally it assumed different forms in the one from what it did in the other. Men daub walls, women sew, make veils, &c. Both are deceiving, and shall certainly be set at nought. There seems no weight to be accorded to the suggestion that the existence of these prophetesses was proof of "a fresh instance of declension into heathen usages." The gift of true prophecy came to holy women in the earlier history of Israel before Christ and also in the later, and might be pretended to.

Ver. 18. Ignorance of the practices alluded to here stands in the way of clearing up the meaning of this verse. We can decide only by probabilities. "**Woe unto the women who sew coverings on every joint of the hands.**" Whether these coverings were cushions or amulets or other objects, their use seems to have been to make an appearance which would impress the people. So with the following, "**And who make veils on the head of every stature;**" under the envelopment of clothing on the head adapted to their varying size—figure, age, condition—they fitted themselves to act upon their hearers, "**to hunt [as bird-catcher's] souls,**" and thus ensnare to their ruin. The verse condemns sensational methods of divination resorted to by the prophetesses, whether the method was by gesture or dress or word. Hence the question of surprise at the infatuation which would use such means. "**The souls of my people will ye hunt and the souls of yourselves will ye keep alive?**" Persuading themselves of their own security, they entered on practices intended to persuade the Israelites to the same confidence, while destruction only would result to them.

Ver. 19. "**And will ye profane me among my people,**" by prophesying in my name, **for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread,** offerings such as were brought when consulting a seer (1 Sam. ix. 7, 8; 1 Kings xiv. 3; cf. Mic. iii. 5); and by declaring that ye speak the words of the Lord when they are not, the result of such profaning the Lord being "**to slay souls which should not die and to keep alive souls which should not live, by your lying to my people, hearers of lying.**

Ver. 20. Punishment of the women. "**Behold I [come] to your coverings with which ye hunt souls as [if they were] flying [birds], and I tear them off your arms.**" Their snares shall be spread in vain, "**I set free the souls which ye hunt, the souls**" which ye deal with "**as flying [birds].**" Ver. 21. "**And I tear your veils and deliver my people from your hand.**" Ye seduce them by your various artifices, so as to destroy the people, and I would expose your pretences so as to save them. Ver. 22. Because the prophetesses have acted so that false impressions of God are produced on the mind of the righteous and wicked, disheartening the former in good and confirming the latter in evil ways, "**Therefore ye shall not see vanity and shall not divine divinations any more, and I will deliver my people out of your hand.**" It is with God they are in conflict, and the utter failure of their prophecies will so appear that "**ye shall know that I am the Lord:**" knowledge of God is for the guilty a doom, for the righteous a security.

HOMILETICS.

WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS.

Serious events were about to occur in Israel. The shadow of them was cast over women as well as men. Spiritual influence knows no sex. Women

"show piety at home," in the more retired ways along which the little ones, the weak, the downcast of the world make their journey, but the groundswell of religious emotion rolling over a people impels some of its women into open and even audacious appearances.

I. **The women assume deceptive methods.** By dresses, or gestures, or other devices they pander to the senses so as to attract and impress those who hear them. If women are naturally more disposed to such methods than men, yet the warning is of unrestricted interest, that external representations in religion are of uncertain tendency; strong to promote error, they are poor allies in advancing truth.

II. **Women are induced to act from unworthy motives.** There is *desire for power*. They strive to move and control souls, and thus, as in later days, to "glory in the flesh" with their adherents. There is *self-regard*. They persuade themselves that things will turn out so as to bring security for themselves, to save their own souls, even though they shrink from the narrow way of life and endure no hardness. There is *greed*. A very trifling present gets them to say that all is well when all is not well; that that is right which is wrong before God.

III. **They are held responsible for their procedure.** They hide the threatenings of the Lord, or pare down their awful meaning. They comfort souls in sin; distress souls seeking God. The painful result of their lies is that they hunt into peril those whom God would rescue; seize and kill souls whom God would save. Standing thus against God's love and grace, they are counted out for condemnation, as the false prophets were. She who sins must suffer loss.

Error Preached (ver. 22).

I. **The painful effects of erroneous teachings.** The good are disheartened by scruples, perplexities, fears, and weakened to pursue their journey in the ways of the Lord: the evil are emboldened to go on the broad road by opiates to conscience and confirmation to unbelief.

II. **The contrariety to God in them.** He is the God of all comfort to those that fear His name; but this teaching breaks the inflow of His promises. He would make the dead in trespasses and sins to live through faith in Christ the Truth; but this teaching prevents faith, and He can do no mighty work of salvation.

III. **The valid test for them.** When high pretensions, dogmatic operations, fascinating proffers act so as to relax supreme regard to truth, righteousness, purity, and a true follower of Christ is depressed; or when hopes are produced in the mind of those who are not yielding themselves unto God that they will live, then each class may know that the words they hear are opposed to those of Him who is the true and living One, and are condemned by Him.

1. *A people professing to know the Lord are not unaffected by the popular erroneous teaching of their day.* 2. *They may hope for His interference in their behalf, for He lays their real interest deeply to heart.*

Jehovah's Refusal to allow Idolaters to enquire of Him: the certainty of the Judgments denounced against them (Chap. xiv.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The visit of the elders of the people to the prophet was the occasion of this word of God. They were alarmed by the threatenings which the prophet uttered, but they yet hoped to obtain from him a more favourable answer. They make an appeal to God's mercy, but are silent concerning the greatness of their sin or any purpose of repentance. These elders were not the representatives of the majority of the exiles who practised the most open and the boldest forms of idolatry;

but rather of those who, though they outwardly feared God, yet inwardly served the world and the spirit of the age. "These men have set up idols in their heart" (ver. 3). The prophet's answer to their inquiry extends to verse 11. The latter part of the chapter declares that the coming judgments on Jerusalem will not be averted even for the sake of the righteous few therein.

THE LORD GIVES NO ANSWER TO THE IDOLATERS (vers. 1–11).

Ver. 1. "**The elders of Israel.**" "These men were not deputies from the Israelites in Palestine, but elders of the exiles among whom Ezekiel had been labouring" (*Keil*). Their object in this visit is not distinctly stated, but probably it was that they might know something further concerning the duration of the captivity, or the fate of Jerusalem. Unlike the elders in chap. xx. 1, they had not come with the definite purpose of inquiring of the Lord.

Vers. 2 and 3. "**These men have set up their idols in their heart.**" They were not given to the grosser forms of idolatry, but they were strangers to the true worship of God. They had set up some object of their own creation, which they put in the place of God. They allowed their minds to be deluded by phantoms. In heart and spirit they were one with the worst idolaters around them. "**And put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face.**" They even refused to put away idols from their presence. They sought not to flee from temptation by removing what would be an occasion and reminder of sin. "**Should I be enquired of at all by them?**" This question implies a strong negation.

Ver. 4. "**I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols.**" The form of the verb to "answer" gives the meaning, "I the Lord will answer him by myself," instead of by the prophet. The manner in which the Lord will answer the idolatry is set forth in ver. 8. They are to be treated as all idols should be treated.

Ver. 5. "**That I may take the house of Israel in their heart.**" The Lord will reach the very seat of idolatry, touch their conscience, and bring down their heart by judgments.

Vers. 6–8. Repetition of the threat already uttered, and also of the summons to repentance. "**Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.**" "We have here a combination of the Kal and Hiphil conjugations for the sake of emphasis. Return unreservedly from your abominable idolatries. Be no longer estranged from me, either in heart or practice. They were neither to hanker after in desire, nor look towards the accursed thing" (*Henderson*). "**Every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel.**" All who hypocritically applied to the prophet, whether proselytes or native Jews, were liable to the same judgments. Strangers were only permitted to dwell in the land of Israel on condition of forsaking all idolatry and all moral abominations, and worshipping Jehovah alone (Lev. xx. 2, xviii. 26, xvii. 10; Ex. xii. 19). "**And will make him a sign and a proverb.**" "The expression is a pregnant one; I make him desolate, so that he becomes a sign and proverb" (*Keil*). "An exemplary punishment" (*Heng.*)

Vers. 9–11. No prophet is to give any other answer. "**And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet.**" He who delivers any other message, though he may think that he speaks the word of the Lord, is not a true prophet. When God is represented as deceiving such a prophet, we are to understand something more than merely a permissive sense, as if God allowed it and did not interfere to prevent the deception. It was Jehovah who sent the lying spirit into the prophets of Ahab, and for this very purpose, that

by predicting success to the king they might secure his fall (1 Kings xxii. 20, &c.) "This persuading of the prophets to the utterance of self-willed words, which have not been inspired by God, only takes place in persons who admit evil into themselves, and is designed to tempt them and lead them to decide whether they will endeavour to resist and conquer the sinful inclinations of their hearts, or will allow them to shape themselves into outward deeds, in which case they will become ripe for judgment. It is in this sense that God persuades such a prophet, in order that He may then cut him off out of His people" (*Keil*). "If matters should turn out differently from what the prophet expected and foretold, I have so ordered them in the course of my providence as to issue in such a result. It is the prerogative of Deity to control the sinful operations of created minds, without interfering with free agency" (*Henderson*). "**The punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him.**" The false prophets and those who inquire of them are both alike guilty, and come into the same condemnation. Neither in one nor in the other was there any desire to learn the truth, but rather to seek excuse for their sins and errors even by the daring impiety of demanding for them the sanctions of religion. "**That the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions.**" "It serves to purify the people of God For the particular sinful generation it flows from the principle of retribution; but for the whole community of God a purpose of mercy lies at the ground of the exercise of this retribution. The prophet here clearly opens up the view to the light which shines behind the darkness." (*Heng.*) "It was to this end that, in the last times of the kingdom of Judah, God allowed false prophecy to prevail so mightily, —namely, that it might accelerate the process of distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked; and then, by means of the judgment which destroyed the wicked, purify His nation and lead it on to the great end of its calling" (*Keil*).

HOMILETICS.

Hypocritical Inquirers after God.

These elders had come as a deputation from among the exiles in order to consult Ezekiel as a prophet of the Lord. They had come from a distance, and are to be distinguished from those mentioned in chap. viii. 1 who were already with the prophet. We are not told expressly what their purpose was. They may have sought guidance concerning some question which they felt to be a difficulty. They may have simply waited to hear what seasonable truth the prophet had still to utter. But from ver. 3 we learn that they certainly did come in the character of inquirers. And the answer which the Lord gives through theprophet shows that they were not sincere, but hypocritical inquirers. We have here the great features of all such.

I. They closely imitate the conduct of real inquirers. Hypocrites are generally described as those who deceive others by making an outward show of piety. But the sacred writers call those hypocrites not only who deceived others, but deceived even themselves. These closely imitate the religious actions of the pious, but they are ignorant of those deep spiritual principles upon which such conduct is founded. These have no true knowledge of God. They only know Him by tradition and the customs of religious service and worship. These elders had some of the qualities of real inquirers after the mind and will of God. 1. *They were already stirred by the message of the prophet.* They took alarm at his threatenings. They were afraid at God's judgments. 2. *They come to the*

prophet, as an inspired messenger of God, for further counsel. They were the subjects of religious awakening, and professed themselves ready to learn all the will of God. Men may go as far as this without any true and essential knowledge of the realities of religion.

II. They lack the proper characteristics of real inquirers. 1. *They apply to religious teachers, not to be instructed in God's will, but to be confirmed in their own superstitions and errors.* They were ready to hear and obey the prophet so long as he prophesied after their own heart. While religion did not interfere with their cherished convictions and prospects they were ready to obey its precepts and ordinances. They did not really believe that the threatened judgments would come to pass, and they desired a prophet who would confirm them in their false hopes. Such men feel a certain satisfaction in heaping to themselves teachers. In some way they feel the necessity of obtaining the sanctions of religion. But they come to the prophet not to learn, but to be confirmed in the purpose of their evil heart. They have not learned what it is to surrender the mind as well as the heart and will to God. 2. *They retain sin in their heart, though they avoid the outward manifestation of it.* They abstained from the gross forms of idolatry which were practised by their countrymen, but "they set up their idols in their heart" (ver. 3). The real root-principle of idolatry was still in them. 3. *They take no steps to remove the occasions of sin.* "They put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face" (ver. 3). While these outward temptations and means of sin are suffered to remain, it is of no use to seek first to cleanse the heart. Images must first be destroyed, else there is little prospect of rooting out idolatry from the land. Religious teachers should testify against both outward and inward idolatry. If idols are not removed from the eyes of men the temptation to worship them will remain, however faithful the teaching may be against the sin of it. The outward forms of superstition should first be destroyed, else there is little hope of promoting the pure worship of the heart.

III. They are exposed to terrible judgments. Even though they inquire of a true prophet and cannot be charged with open transgression. 1. *They cannot hope to deceive God, who sees and knows the heart.* God can see into the depths of the heart, which is the real man. It is the sinful heart within which makes the outward temptations of the world dangerous. 2. *They are left to the action of the law of retribution.* Retribution in *kind*, "according to the multitude of his idols" (ver. 4). They trusted in idols; let them have them now. Let them see what their own refuges can do for them. *God refuses to be inquired of them.* "He heareth not sinners" (John ix. 31). The Word of God is taken away from the despisers of the truth (Acts xiii. 46). There is a time when God gives an answer, but not as men desire, and there is also a time when He refuses to answer. In both these modes of treatment He shows His righteous indignation. Sinners are left without answer or help in order that they might come to the true knowledge of their sin.

IV. Their only hope for escape is by a thorough repentance 1. *The heart must be turned to God.* "Repent and turn yourselves from your idols" (ver. 6). The Lord will not share His glory with another. The heart must be entirely given up to the service and worship of the only God. 2. *The outward occasions of sin must be removed.* "Turn your faces from all your abominations" (ver. 6). They must avoid the outward forms of idolatry lest they should become again a temptation and a snare. Their repentance must be a complete reformation both of the outer and of the inner life.

IDOLATRY IN THE HEART (ver. 3).

Idolatry is an old sin. The worship of the true God is older; but it was soon corrupted, for men "did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (Rom. i 28)

There may be idolatry in the heart even when idols are abolished from external worship. God's commandment is "exceeding broad." Idols have long been banished from our land, and therefore the second commandment has in one sense become obsolete. But all that is essential to the sin of worshipping them may still be found even in Christian lands. Everything that stands between a man's soul and heaven is an idol,—it is that which he trusts in with his whole heart. For the root-principle of idolatry is the tendency to put something in the place of God, to allow the mind to be deluded by phantoms. Idols of all kinds are mere phantoms, they are (as St. Paul tells us) nothing in the world; there is no reality in them. When God is not truly known to the soul within, the man of necessity becomes an idolater. Whatever hinders the true knowledge of God is idolatry. Bacon, the father of modern science, has distinguished certain idols or phantoms which interfere with human knowledge. These *idols* he represents as certain false notions which possess the mind, and which must be dislodged if men would attain to the truth concerning the knowledge of man and nature. There are "idols of the *tribe*," "of the *cave*," "of the *market-place*," "of the *theatre*." It will be found that idolatries in religion spring from similar sources.

I. **Idols of the tribe.** By which Bacon means, *those errors and false conceptions which have their origin in human nature itself.* He says that "the human mind is like a false mirror, which, receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolours the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it." Does not this speak to us of our natural ignorance of God, which distorts all the indications He has given us of His character and will? It may assume the form of gross idolatry, of atheism, of indifference, or of the various forms of superstition where ignorant fear is substituted for the worship of Him who alone is to be feared.

II. **Idols of the cave.** Bacon describes these as *the sources of error which belong to individual men.* These may arise from the peculiar constitution of our mind, from our early habits and education, from all those influences which form our individual characters. "Each man," says Bacon, "has a den or cave of his own." Sometimes it is dark and comfortless, shutting out the light of heaven, full of doleful things and gloomy fears. Each man has some infirmity of mind or temper which leads him to judge wrongly of God and of duty. Each man has his besetting sin, and must bear his own burden, fight against his own enemies, and seek peace for his own soul.

III. **Idols of the market-place.** These are described as *false notions or conceptions, which arise from the intercourse of men with each other.* It may be that each man in his own cave—in himself as an individual—is ashamed of the customs and notions of which men as communities approve. But these are often deemed respectable and right if only they are adopted by good society, or by common usage, or by the laws and customs of that particular business or profession to which the man belongs.

IV. **Idols of the theatre.** By which are meant *those hindrances to the knowledge of the truth which have been imported into men's minds from the various dogmas of human philosophies.* It is certainly a hindrance in all intellectual pursuits that many ingenious men have gone wrong before us. Hence knowledge is retarded. Mental power is wasted, for some wiser man must arise to clear away those errors to which great men of former times have given currency. We have such *idols of the theatre* in *religion*,—each successive system of infidel philosophy, rationalism, every device for setting aside the revelation which God has given of Himself to man in Jesus Christ, every attempt to get rid of the supernatural and divine element in the Scriptures of God. All these have hidden God from many human souls. They are the peculiar temptations of intellectual men, of speculative minds. Such are often free from vulgar temptations, and it would seem as if in this way their proper measure of the difficulties of probation is filled up to them. And all idols, whether they spring from that nature which is

common to mankind, or from each man's peculiarities of temper and disposition, or from the customs of human business and conventional moralities, or from those ingenious speculations which we find in books,—all these are only to be overcome by the recognition of God in Christ. They are all mere phantoms, they hide God from the soul, they lead us astray, they have no power to teach us, they cannot bring us nearer heaven. But God has not left us to wander in uncertainty. He has given us the true Light. Our blessed Lord said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He gives the invitation, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He will give us rest from the pursuit of vanities of all kinds, from empty speculations which weary the soul for no profit. If we have found the true we cannot worship the false. If we are true worshippers of Christ we must put away all our idols, for He will not share His love and worship with another. Christ gives us the true idea of God. The sin of idolatry is not now impossible though idols are removed from the eyes of men. The Second Commandment may be dead as concerns the letter of it, but the spirit of it is as potent as ever to convince men of sin. How many professed worshippers in the Christian Church set up their idols in their heart and then come to inquire of God! There is a tendency to worship something which is not God, to deny Him the full devotion of our hearts. Even when men will scarcely dare entirely to leave His service, they still strive to serve two masters. All who love pleasure, earthly honours and distinctions, more than they love God, are idolaters. In short, all are involved in this sin who seek the world first before the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

The Inquirers of False Prophets (vers. 9–11).

I. They hope to obtain a more favourable answer. The true prophets do not speak that which they would like to hear, so they seek teachers after their own minds. They will undertake to decide for themselves what prophets are true or false by the correspondence of the message with their own corrupt wishes. They are willingly deceived.

II. They do not thereby escape God's judgments. 1. *Even false prophets are by the will of God.* "I the Lord have deceived that prophet" (ver. 9). God permits such men to preach error, as He permits all other evils to prevail in the world. He does not suppress them by an act of power. He allows the tares and the wheat to grow together until the appointed time of judgment. And we must learn from God's dealings with mankind the lesson of toleration. If we attempt to pluck up the tares we run the risk of rooting out the wheat also. No man has knowledge or skill enough which will serve him to anticipate God's final judgment. He who attempts this may, indeed, do some good, but he will certainly do much harm. 2. *God uses and controls evil for the working out of His purposes.* It is true that "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man" (James i. 13). But God makes use of the sins of men in working out His great designs. Thus He allows men to fall into one sin as a punishment for another. These exiles loved to be deceived, and they were deceived. They loved darkness, and they were allowed to wander into greater darkness. A man must either repent, or he must continue in the sinful path towards his punishment. It is by God's law that even the germs of sin are permitted to be planted, to be fostered, and to grow, so that sin shall attain to its full maturity and bring on its own punishment. God's Providence so orders the course of events that men who will not have the truth shall be brought to ruin by a lie.

III. These judgments are intended for the benefit of God's people. 1. *To*

preserve them from transgression (ver. 11). 2. *To test their faith.* By the flourishing of false prophets their own fidelity and steadfastness would be tried. The prevalence of error makes manifest the tried and approved children of truth (1 Cor. xi. 19). 3. *To confirm their faith.* By witnessing the judgments of God fulfilled upon others. 4. *To teach them to realise their relationship to God.* "That they may be my people, and I may be their God" (ver. 11). We can have no true peace until we know that the Lord is our God. The essence of religion consists in the appropriation of God by the soul. 5. *To separate between the righteous and the ungodly.* God may use even sin and error to contribute to this final purpose of His judgment (2 Thess. ii. 10, 11).

(Ver. 9.)

False prophets were both in Judea and in Babylon, and the people had often recourse unto them. They spake pleasing things. They told them who were in Judea that Nebuchadnezzar should never subdue and carry them captives; yea, they told them that those in Babylon should shortly return. These were vain, false, and deceitful prophecies, and Divine Providence ordered it so. We have here—

I. A supposition. "If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing." The false prophets were deceived in what they spake to the people. Zedekiah and the rest of the prophets which bade Ahab to go up to Ramoth-Gilead and prosper, were deceived (1 Kings xxii). Hananiah and Shelemiah made that people trust in a lie (Jer. xxviii. 15, xxxix. 31). They were deceived in their prophets, and deceive others.

II. An assertion. "I the Lord have deceived that prophet." These words sound very harsh, and no man durst have attributed them unto the Lord, had not He Himself said so. The words, "I have deceived" are to be taken as a judicial act of God, who, dealing with them as delinquents, punisheth them with this special judgment of seduction; they were idolatrous and hypocritical, and God punished those sins with others, and so accidentally was the efficient cause of their deception. God finding those men false and forward to deceive, hearkening to their own hearts, and following their own spirits (Ez. xiii. 2, 3), He gave them up and over to vain visions and lying divinations, which was one punishment, and to perdition, which was another punishment following thereupon. Have you a mind to be prophets, to prophesy lies? Ye shall be so. In Isa. lxiii. 17, we read, "O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?" God did this in judgment to the people who affected false prophets, and chose their own ways (Isa. lxvi. 3), and delighted in their abominations. He in judgment gave them up to their own ways, and to hardness of heart (Ps. lxxi. 11, 12).

III. A threatening. "I will stretch out my hand upon him." God would put forth His power to punish such a prophet. But if God deceived him, how can He in justice punish or destroy that prophet? We answer, 1. *The false prophet did whatever he did freely.* He was not forced by any power or act of God. His seduction was principally from himself; and it was his own fault that he was deceived, that he deceived others. 2. *A man may serve Providence, and yet sin against the law of God.* The secret Providence had ordered it that this people should be seduced by false prophets, yet God in His word had forbidden such (Deut. xiii). And because men are to look at what is written, not what is secret and hidden, therefore if they violate the law, God may justly punish thereupon (Acts iv. 27, 28). Herod, Pilate, Judas, and the Jews, they did to Christ whatsoever God had determined to be done, yet they were not without sin, nor without punishment, because they transgressed the rule given them. We make two observations,—(1.) *The Lord, in His infinite wisdom and*

justice, doth make a punishment of sin, and punish one sin with another. Besides corporal judgments He hath spiritual; if the prophet be deceived, "I the Lord have deceived him," I have laid this judgment upon him, that he should be deceived, led into errors, and deceive others; this he hath deserved at my hands, and this punishment in just judgment I inflict upon him. The Scriptures hold out frequently this way of God's proceedings with sinners, His punishment of one sin with another; (2 Chron. xxv. 17–20; Jer. iv. 10; Rom. i. 25, 26; 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11). (2.) *God will deal severely with false prophets.* "I will stretch out my hand upon him." He would be made an example to all, as were Hananiah and Shemaiah (Jer. xxviii. 15, 16; xxix. 31, 32.—*Greenhill*).

"The great sophister and prince of darkness (God permitting him) can strangely blindfold our reason and muffle our understanding; and, no doubt, the chiefest cause that most of the obstinate, besotted sinners of the world are not sensible that the devil blinds and abuses them is, that he has indeed actually done so already. For how dreadfully did God consign over the heathen world to a perpetual slavery to Satan's deceits! They worshipped him, they consulted with him, and so absolutely were they sealed up under the ruling cheat, that they took all his tricks and impostures for *Oracle* and *Instruction*. And the truth is, when men under the powerful preaching of the Gospel will grow heathens in the viciousness of their practices, it is but just with God to suffer them (by a very natural transition) to grow heathens, too, in the grossness of their delusions."—*South*.

JUDAH AND JERUSALEM CANNOT CLAIM EXEMPTION FROM JUDGMENTS BECAUSE OF THE RIGHTEOUS FEW THEREIN (vers. 12–23).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 12, 13. "**When the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously.**" Their sin is more particularly defined as "trespass," the literal expression being "to trespass a trespass," *i.e.* to commit a very great trespass. The first signification of the Hebrew word is "to cover," and therefore it is used to denote acting in any secret or treacherous manner, especially towards Jehovah, either by outward or inward idolatry or by withholding what is due to Him. Here the treachery specially pointed out is that of apostasy from God by idolatry.

Ver. 14. "**Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it.** These men are named as well-known examples of true righteousness of life. They were just in their generation, living that life of obedience which springs from faith in God. Noah is so described in Gen. vi. 9; and Job, in the Book of Job i. 1; and Daniel, in like manner, is classed with these ancient men as one who confessed a true faith by a righteous life. "The fact that Daniel is named before Job does not warrant the conjecture that some other older Daniel is meant, of whom nothing is said in the history, and whose existence is merely postulated. For the enumeration is not intended to be chronological, but is arranged according to the subject-matter; the order being determined by the nature of the deliverance experienced by these men for their righteousness in the midst of great judgments. Hävernick shows we have a climax here: Noah saved his family along with himself; Daniel was able to save his friends (Dan. ii. 17, 18); but Job, with his righteousness, was not even able to save his children" (*Keil*).

Ver. 15. "**If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land.**" "Beasts" in the usual sense, or in human form (ver. 17.)" (*Hengstenberg*), comp. Ex. v. 17; Lev. xxvi. 22; 2 Kings xvii. 25.

Ver. 16. "**They shall deliver neither sons nor daughters.**" "In the first instance, it is simply stated that Noah, Daniel, and Job would save their soul, *i.e.* their life, by their righteousness; whereas, in the three others, it

is declared that as truly as the Lord liveth they would not save either sons or daughters, but they alone would be delivered. The difference is not merely a rhetorical climax or progress in the address by means of asseveration and antithesis, but indicates a distinction in the thought. The first case is only intended to teach that in the approaching judgment the righteous would save their lives, *i.e.* that God would not sweep away the righteous with the ungodly. The three cases which follow are intended, on the other hand, to exemplify the truth that the righteousness of the righteous will be of no avail to the idolaters and apostates; since even such patterns of righteousness as Noah, Daniel, and Job would only be able to save their own lives, and would not be able to save the lives of others also. This tallies with the omission of the asseveration in ver. 14. The first declaration, that God would deliver the righteous in the coming judgments, needed no asseveration, inasmuch as this truth was not called in question; but it was required in the case of the declaration that the righteousness of the righteous would bring no deliverance to the sinful nation, since this was the hope which the ungodly cherished, and it was this hope which was to be taken from them" (*Keil*).

Vers. 17–20. Two more great judgments are threatened. "The four visitations of God, each introduced with an *if*, should actually come, as had been repeatedly predicted, unitedly upon the degenerate covenant people, upon the desecrated land of the Lord. The transition from the merely hypothetical to the actual follows in ver. 21. The *for* at the beginning points to the ground of the discussion instituted, shows that it is no mere idle common place" (*Heng.*)

Ver. 21. "**How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem.**" "How much more must the general standard of the Divine judgments manifest itself before all in the servant, who knows his master's will, and yet does what is worthy of stripes! 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities,' says Amos" (*Heng.*) "**The sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence.**" "The number *four* may possibly symbolise the completeness of the judgment, as one on all sides. Formerly famine was first; here it is the *sword*, because the calamity of war lay immediately before them. In consequence of it the other three judgments came one after another. War brings famine into the cities; corpses outside, which attract the beasts; and from all these follows the pestilence" (*Lange*).

Ver. 22. "**Therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth.**" "A remnant," *i.e.*, persons who have escaped destruction. These shall be brought forth, *i.e.*, led out of Jerusalem "unto you." They shall join those who are already in exile in Babylon. "**Sons and daughters.**" "These are called sons and daughters, with an allusion to vers. 16, 18, and 20; and consequently we must not take these words as referring to the younger generation in contrast to the older" (*Keil*). "**Ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem.**" They shall be comforted in seeing the justification of the ways of God.

Ver. 23. "**Their ways and their doings.**" "Not those ways by which they had provoked the Lord to punish the nation, but the fruits of righteousness—the good works to the practice of which they had been recovered by the severe discipline through the course of which they had been brought. While they justified God in all the calamities which He had inflicted upon them, their being spared was a proof of His great mercy, and a pledge that, if their brethren in the captivity followed their example by renouncing idolatry, they also should be dealt with in mercy" (*Hend.*)

HOMILETICS.

THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD UPON NATIONS.

I. They usually take the shape of great public calamities. 1. *The sources of the national wealth are undermined.* "I will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it" (ver. 13). Bread, the chief food of man, may well be called "the staff of life." It is the prop which supports man's physical nature, and when it is taken away he sinks exhausted to the ground. Famine is one of God's sore judgments, for it seizes upon what is man's greatest treasure, his life. Man and beast fail; the means of useful labour and food are cut off. The very foundations of life are destroyed. 2. *The invasion of enemies.* "If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land" (ver. 15). Man was invested with dominion over the beasts of the earth. By virtue of the power of his mind, and not merely by physical force, he retains his sovereignty over them. And God's providence wonderfully preserves the balance of power between man and the lower animals. He sets a watch over all His creatures, so that they shall not pass His commandment, but fulfil His purpose in placing man head over all here below. But sin interferes with man's complete dominion; and it is, after all, but a broken sceptre that he holds in his hand. God, for purposes of judgment, allows beasts to overcome man. Another enemy to nations is the *sword.* God says, "Sword, go through the land" (ver. 17). War is one of the scourges which God uses to punish wicked nations. All the evils mentioned in this section—devouring beasts, pestilence, and famine—follow in its track. 3. *Pestilence.* "Or, if I send a pestilence into that land" (ver. 19). In famine and other calamities men of wealth may be able to keep the enemy for a long while at bay, or even to hold out to the end. But they have no defence against pestilence. Then does the Angel of Death walk through the land with impartial step, sparing no age or condition.

II. Though they may be traced to natural causes they are still the work of God. War, pestilence, and famine, are due to the operation of natural laws. But it is also true that God sends them; for He is behind all nature, and behind all human history, whether in justice or in the mysterious march of its events. The calamities that fall upon nations have deep moral causes, and ultimately resolve themselves into the righteous will of God in His manifest indignation against human sin. 1. *Nations, as such, are under moral law.* This law expresses the will of God in regard to human conduct. 2. *The transgression of those laws involves penalty.* History has many sad examples which show how the moral corruption of a nation may become so great as to bring about its destruction. Nations can only be judged in this life, for as such they do not exist in another world. When a land sins against God by "trespassing grievously," the calamities which are visited upon it are seen to come from God by all who believe that there is a moral Governor of the world.

III. They cannot always be averted by pleading the righteousness of the few therein. Abraham's intercession for Sodom establishes that principle of God's government by which whole nations are spared great judgments for the sake of the few righteous among them. The faithful few among many faithless are as the salt which preserves the whole community from corruption. We are exhorted and encouraged to pray for others, and even to be so bold as to ask that the hand of justice might be stayed when it is lifted against the ungodly. But there are limits to intercession. Even the prayers of Abraham could not save the devoted cities of the plain. In like manner the iniquity of Jerusalem had grown so great that the prayers and godly influence of men of such famous righteousness as Noah, Daniel, and Job, could not save it from the threatened

doom. The Jews placed great reliance upon the intercession of the saints, and counted upon it as a refuge from judgment. They are now told that this is a vain hope, that God's righteous law must take its course, and that the most holy men can but save themselves (vers. 14, 16, 18, 20).

IV. The righteousness of God therein will appear unto His people. "And ye shall be comforted" (ver. 22). This comfort would arise from clearly seeing the justification of God's ways (ver. 23). There was a sufficient cause for all the evil which was coming upon Jerusalem, and faithful souls should see how that the ways of the Lord were just. However severe God's judgments may be in His dealings with mankind, it is a comfort when we know and believe that they are righteous. What a lesson for Christian nations! They are governed by the same great moral principles, but with added light their responsibilities are greater.

(Ver. 14.)

From this passage we may infer two things—

I. That there are seasons when even the intercession of the most eminent will not avail. There are seasons in which it is unalterably determined to inflict punishment.

II. That these are so rare and so extraordinary that to declare He will not turn away for intercession is the strongest token of His fierce indignation. (1.) If God delights to hear prayer it is most reasonable to believe He will favourably regard intercessory prayer; for then the supplicant is exercising two most important virtues at once, piety and benevolence. He is then employed in fulfilling the whole law, and makes the nearest approach to the divine nature. (2.) Examples of its success—Abraham, Moses, and Job.—*R. Hall.*

"Noah, Daniel, and Job."

Some make great inquiry why these three men should be mentioned rather than others, and they give in their answer:—1. It is thought that they are named, for that they could not divert God's wrath by their holiness and prayers from the people of their times. Noah could not keep off the flood, nor Job the sad things which befel him and his, nor Daniel the captivity. 2. Others think they are named because they freed others in imminent danger in their times. Noah saved his family from the flood; Job prayed for his friends, and they were spared; Daniel preserved the magicians and wise men. But rather they are named, because they were men of great holiness, exercised with great trials, and so the more fervent in prayer. And what if these men, who were so acceptable to me, had so much interest in me and often prevailed with me, should pray for you, yet they should do nothing for your deliverance by their prayers. These were men in great afflictions, and affliction is the whetstone of prayer, the bellows to blow up that fire.—*Greenhill.*

(Vers. 22, 23.)

1. When God's judgments are sorest, yet then He shows mercy to some. 2. The Lord will satisfy and comfort the hearts of His people against the evil and scandal that comes by any of His judgments. When Jerusalem was destroyed, the Jews rooted out and carried to Babylon, what joy was there in the nations! what reproachings of the Jews! Where is now their God? At these things the Jews' hearts in Babylon were grieved, offended; therefore the Lord tells them, they "shall be comforted concerning all the evil He hath brought upon Jerusalem." They shall know the greatness of their sins which moved Him to do so. **3. That the Lord is righteous and just in His judgments.** "I

have not done without cause all that I have done in Jerusalem." It is the devil's design to hurt without cause; therefore saith God, "Thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause" (Job ii. 3). But God would not do it; whatever He doth He hath great cause for. He is the only and infinitely wise God, and doth all things upon the height of reason. Their sins were such as impeached His honour, corrupted His worship, broke the covenant, questioned His providence, violated justice, and conformed them to the heathen. He had cause enough to do what He did, namely, to vindicate His honour, worship, covenant, providence, justice, and to show that His people, if they will sin with the world, must suffer grevious things for it. 4. Men shall know in due time the equity of God's judgments. They are a great depth. Men cannot sound or measure them (Ps. xxxvi. 6). The causes of them are hidden from the eyes of most. Job's friends mistook the cause of God's dealing so sharply with him, but afterwards they understood it. They in Babylon, and others, were astonished at the sore judgments of God, but God let them know the cause of it, and so they were brought to justify God (1 Kings ix. 7–9). God proclaims the cause of His severe judgments, so that men may see the equity of them, that "He is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works" (Ps. cxlv. 17).—*Greenhill.*

Israel Compared to the Useless Wood of a Wild Vine (Chap. xv.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—In the last chapter the prophet had announced that God would not spare Jerusalem for the sake of the few righteous therein. In this chapter he destroys another refuge in which they trusted. He shows how His people Israel have no native superiority over other nations, no such intrinsic value as would entitle them to be considered as a special case. They may have rested secure in the thought that Israel is compared to a vine (Ps. lxxx.), that they could not be rejected and punished because of their election. The prophet's answer to this false confidence is, that Israel is no longer a true vine, but mere wood, yea, even the most useless of all wood, and only fit to serve as fuel for the fire. In vers. 1–5 the figure is worked out in the shape of a parable. In vers. 6–8 we have the application of the parable. God will deal with Jerusalem as men deal with the wood of the forest vine, the worthless remains of a barren tree.

Vers. 1 and 2. **"What is the vine tree more than any tree?"** It was a standing figure with the prophets to compare Israel to a vine or vineyard (Isa. v.; Hos. x., Jer. ii. 21), and always, with the exception of Ps. lxxx., to point out its degeneracy.

Ver. 3. **Shall the wood be taken thereof to do any work?** It is useless as a material for making any instrument. "For use its diameter even unfits it; while its appearance is too paltry for ornament, and it is too weak to bear anything except fruit" (*Lange*).

Ver. 4. **"Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work?"** The answer to this question is given in the next verse, the force of which is this,—If in its perfect state it cannot be put to any useful purpose, how much less when it is partially scorched and consumed!

Ver. 6. **"So will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem."** "The Jews having utterly failed to answer the divine purpose in selecting them to be witnesses for Jehovah in the midst of the heathen, they were to be completely broken up as a nation, and punished by severe and fiery trials in succession, till the dross of their idolatry was purged away. When a professing people act unworthily of their calling, they are only fit to be rejected" (Matt. iii. 10, v. 13) (*Henderson*).

Ver. 7. **"They shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them."** "Out of a fire one must come

either burned or scorched. Israel has been in the fire already. It resembles a wild vine which has been consumed at both ends by the fire, while the middle has been scorched, and which is now about to be given up altogether to the fire" (*Keil*).

Ver. 8. "And I will make the land desolate." Repeating the threat of chap. xiv. 13, 15.

HOMILETICS.

The End of Man's Existence (ver. 2).

The vine-tree is weaker than most trees, so as to be unfit for any work, and would therefore be very contemptible but for that property it possesses of bringing forth a valuable and delicious fruit. On this account it is highly prized and diligently cultivated. But if it fail of producing fruit, the only purpose to which it can be applied is to turn it to fuel. Such is the figurative representation which the prophet gives us in this passage of man, considered especially as the object of divine care and culture. He is naturally capable of yielding a precious fruit; in this consists his sole excellency; this is the sole end of his existence; and if he fails in this he is of no use but to be destroyed.

I. **Man is naturally capable of yielding a most precious fruit: this fruit consists in living to God.** 1. *He is possessed of all the natural powers which are requisite for that purpose.* He is endowed with reason and understanding, enabling him to perceive the proofs of the being of God, and to entertain just, though inadequate, conceptions of the principal attributes of His nature: His self-existence, His absolute perfection, His power, His wisdom, His all-sufficiency, His omnipresence, His holiness, justice, and goodness. Inferior animals do not; on which account He is the vine-tree amongst the trees of the wood, inferior in many properties to some of them, but superior in those particulars which fit him for this end, and on that account incomparably more valuable. 2. *As we are possessed of natural powers fitting us for the service of God, so He has bestowed upon us much care and culture, with an express view to this end.* The religious instruction He gave to His ancient people is frequently compared in Scripture to the cultivation which men bestow upon vines. "My beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill" (Isa. v. 1). "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant" (Isa. v. 7). He gave them His will, His ordinances, His prophets, and separated them from all nations by peculiar rites, that they might be to Him for a name and a praise and a peculiar treasure above all nations. He has done much more for us under the Gospel. None can be ignorant of the intention of God in all these provisions. "Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how, then, art thou now turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" (Jer. ii. 21).

II. **This is the only end for which mankind are formed and preserved.** This is the proper fruit of human nature, which admits of nothing being substituted in its room. 1. *A mere selfish, voluptuous life, cannot be supposed to be the proper fruit of human nature.* He who lives to himself is universally despised and condemned. "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit to himself" (Hos. x. 1). "For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter" (Deut. xxxii. 32). 2. *A life of social benevolence, in which the public good is preserved, without a supreme regard to God, cannot be this fruit.* Can such persons be said to neglect the end of their existence? Undoubtedly, for the following reasons: (1.) *To do good to our fellow-creatures, without regard to God, is to forget the principal relation in which we stand, and, consequently, to neglect the principal duty.* A right behaviour to each other is no proper compensation for the want of obedient

regards to God (instanced in pirates and rebels). A regard to God is the root and origin of all real virtue. (2.) *The end of man's existence cannot, with any propriety, be considered as confined to this world.* But the proper end accomplished by mere social virtues is entirely confined to the present state. (3.) *No collective number of men can be independent of God, more than a single individual; therefore no such collective body has a right to consult their common interest, to the neglect of God, any more than a single individual to pursue his individual interest.* The aggregate of mankind appears something great and imposing in the eyes of men, in consequence of which a peculiar importance is attached to those actions which tend to the public good. The magnitude of the general interest imposes a value on those actions which are adapted to advance so great an object. But, in the sight of God, all nations are as the "drop of a bucket;" "He taketh up the isles as a very little thing." Suppose all the subjects of a lawful prince were to agree to stand by each other, and to promote each other's interests to the utmost, would this be allowed by the prince as any atonement for a great and persevering rebellion? Or suppose a single individual so disposed, would not the result be the same? No other can be substituted for this.

III. He who answers not the end of his existence is only fit to be destroyed. He is like a vessel marred in the hands of the potter, proper only to be broken. The barren vine may be useful as fuel, and to this purpose it is much applied in eastern countries. Thus wicked men may be useful with a subordinate kind of usefulness, by their destruction. 1. *They may thereby become edifying examples of the just vengeance of God, in order to deter others.* That this will be one of the ends answered by the punishment of the wicked seems intimated in several passages of Scripture, as well as is supported by its analogy to human government. "And they shall go forth and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh" (Isa. lxvi. 24). 2. *They will serve to manifest those attributes of the great Supreme which their conduct disowned, and which it seemed virtually to call in question.* "What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" (Rom. ix. 22). This is a subordinate use, not a primary end. It is that for which men fit themselves by their presumptuous and impenitent neglect of God. (1.) What total blindness attaches to those who live in the total neglect of God and religion! (2.) What little room is there for that confidence which many place in correctness of deportment towards their fellow-creatures, while religion is not even pretended to be the governing principle of their lives! (3.) What need have we all to examine ourselves, and seriously to inquire whether we are yielding that fruit unto God on which we have been insisting! (4.) How ought those to be alarmed when the result of such examination is that they have been hitherto utterly without fruit! How strong the obligations on such, after considering their ways, to turn unto the Lord. And thankful should they be that space is afforded them for repentance and salvation.—*R. Hall.*

The Church is not to be a wilderness, but a vineyard; it is not to bear flowers only, or leaves and twigs merely, but fruit. She is not an apple-tree or fig-tree, but a vine. Wine cheers, inspirits, enlivens. Outwardly insignificant, there is the noblest power within. The grace of Christ working through poor apostles.—*A Lapide.*

(Ver. 1.)

The Jews, who were the Church of God, resembled the vine. 1. Vines are few in respect of other trees, so were the Jews in respect of other people (Deut.

vii. 7). They were the "fewest of all people." 2. Vines are planted by hillsides, by houses, in gardens, orchards, &c., and the Jews were planted in the choicest land; "in a pleasant place" (Hos. ix. 13), "in a very fruitful hill" (Isa. v. 1). The vine was brought out of Egypt; it was a chosen vine, and it was planted (Ps. lxxx. 8), but where? in "a good land," even a land of brooks, fountains, springs, valleys, hills; in a land flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands (Deut. viii. 7; Ezek. xx. 6). Therefore called a branch of His own planting, planted with His right hand (Isa. lx. 21; Ps. lxxx. 15). 3. Vines are weak, must have props and supports to uphold them. God dealt so by the Jews. "In the wilderness the Lord thy God bare thee as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went" (Deut. i. 31). Children are weak, and must be carried in the arms; and so God did carry them (Deut. xxxiii. 27). 4. Fruitful; no tree so fruitful as the vine. It is called the "fruitful vine," it is fruitful in branches, and fruitful in clusters. The Jews were a fruitful nation. "Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons, and now the Lord thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude" (Deut. x. 32). 5. It spreads much; so the Jews, who were God's vine (Ps. lxxx. 9–11). The psalmist saith there of this vine, that it filled the land, covered the hills with its shadow, sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river, and they spread far. 6. It is pleasant and delightful; such were the Jews (Isa. v. 7). 7. Most pains required about vines of any plants or trees; much digging, dressing, pruning, supporting, fencing is needful. The Jews had much pains or cost bestowed upon them (Isa. v. 4). Other trees are little looked after, but the vine must have special care (John xv. 2). The husbandman observes every branch, the fruitful and unfruitful (Amos iii. 2).—*Greenhill.*

The Real Security of Christians.

God's Church is still the same though the outward form of it be changed. It is governed by the same principles, exposed to the same sources of danger, and only safe in the same refuge. The Christian Church is God's Vine, and the reason of its existence, of its continuance, is exactly the same as in the case of His Church of old. What is the real security of Christians? Consider—

I. **What it is not.** 1. *Not in their high calling.* God called the Jews of old from amongst the heathen to be a separate people, a holy nation. He calls His Church now out of the world. Yet this is only means to an end, and not the end itself. He has called His people for a purpose, and if they fail to answer it they only fall from a higher elevation, and therefore into a worse destruction than others. 2. *Not in their great gifts and endowments.* They have the gifts of the Spirit, the means of grace, prophets and teachers, the written Word. With them lies the sacred deposit of God's truth. But these are only the means and appliances of spiritual education. They are not in themselves knowledge, for in spiritual things knowledge comes of doing the will of God. Unless God is seen by the eye of the soul, and enjoyed as a real possession within, the doctrines and ordinances of religion become to us but barren traditions, and outward privileges only a temptation for resting in false security. 3. *Not in what God has already done.* God has cultivated His vine, the Church, with great care. But if any of her members stop short, and so fail to reach the end of God's gracious design, the good which He hath wrought for them will be forfeited and will only increase their judgment. From each who hath not any solid results to show shall be taken away what has already been given, "even that which he hath."

II. **What it is.** The real security of the Christian Church is its fruitfulness. God planted it for this very purpose. 1. *God's honour is concerned in the Church's fruitfulness.* The husbandman likes to see and to show the fruit of his

labours. They are his reward, and they commend to others his diligence and care (St. John xv. 8; St. Matt. v. 16). 2. *It is not what we receive, but what springs up from us into the fruit of good living, that determines our spiritual condition.* God's gifts are a power entrusted to us to be used for His glory. They are the seed which is sown in our hearts; but they are entirely wasted if the fruit does not appear. 3. *The end decides the matter.* It is in vain to rejoice at beginning well, and then imagine that all is done. The end alone determines our state before God. We were made for God's glory, and if we have not reached *that* we have failed. 4. *We must not boast of God's gifts of grace as if they were products of our own nature.* No ground for boasting at all, for we have literally nothing which we have not received. How much more is this true of God's gifts of grace! 5. *We must not turn God's benefits into an excuse for sin.* Our true security lies not in our privileges, but in the good use which we make of them.

(Ver. 8.)

The sins of the inhabitants bring desolation upon a land. Canaan was a pleasant and fruitful land, a very paradise, but because they committed a trespass, corrupted God's worship and oppressed the people, therefore God laid waste the land, even His own vineyard; He plucked away the fence, broke down the wall, and let in those wild beasts, bears, boars, and foxes, the Babylonians, who tore the vine in pieces, and rooted it wholly up, and laid all desolate. Before they came, the land was as the garden of Eden, but they left it a desolate wilderness; and where the vines grew, there were briars and thorns (Isa. vii. 23, 24; Ps. cvii. 3, 4). If we would therefore prevent this, let us hearken to what is said, Jer. v. 7.—*Greenhill.*

Israel's Ingratitude, Punishment, and, in the End, Forgiveness.

(Chap. xvi.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The prophet surveys the entire development of the nation, past and future. Their original condition was most wretched, like that of a miserable infant at its birth utterly neglected and deprived of proper attention and care. God had brought them out of this lowly estate, had saved them from destruction, and had fostered them with His constant love and care until they had reached to a maturity of vigour and loveliness. But in their ingratitude they sinned grievously against Him. They might rest in their position as the chosen vine and think themselves secure, but they are here assured that they are no better than other nations, and are liable to be punished and judged as the heathen around them. Yet, in the end, God will be mindful of His covenant, grant them His forgiveness, and restore them to favour.

Israel's Past Condition, Helpless, Unclean, and about to Perish.

(Vers. 1, 2.)

Vers. 1, 2. "Cause Jerusalem to know her abominations." Jerusalem is used as the symbolical representative of the whole Jewish people. Her sins were greater than those of other nations; they were "abominations," for they were the sins of the covenant people. The main end of this chapter is to declare these abominations.

Ver. 3. "Thy birth and thy nativity is in the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite." "Regarded merely as a city, Jerusalem was neither of Amoritish

nor Hittite origin, but simply a Jebusite city. And it is too obvious to need any proof that the prophetic word does not refer to the city as a city, but that Jerusalem represents the people of Israel, or the covenant nation. It was not the mass of houses, but the population—which was the foundling — that excited Jehovah's compassion, and which He multiplied into myriads (ver. 7), clothed in splendour, and chose as the bride with whom He concluded a marriage covenant. The descent and birth referred to are not physical, but spiritual descent. Spiritually, Israel sprang from the land of the Canaanites; and its father was an Amorite and its mother a Hittite, in the same sense in which Jesus said to the Jews, 'Ye are of your father the devil' (St. John viii. 44). The iniquity of the Amorites was great even in Abraham's time, through not yet full or ripe for destruction (Gen. xv. 16); and the daughters of Heth, whom Esau married, caused Rebekah great bitterness of spirit (Gen. xxvii. 46)" (*Keil*).

Ver. 4. "**Thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee.**" The cutting of the navel-string is necessary for the independent life of the child, and the washing with water to cleanse it from the impurities attaching to it. If these necessary offices are neglected, the infant must perish.

"**Thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all.**" "After the washing, the body was rubbed with salt, according to a custom very widely spread in ancient times, and still met with here and there in the East; and that not merely for making the skin drier and firmer, or of cleansing it more thoroughly, but probably from regard to the virtue of salt as a protection from putrefaction. And, finally, it was bound with swaddling-clothes. Not one of these things, so indispensable to the preservation and strengthening of the child, was performed in the case of Israel at the time of its birth from any feeling of compassionate love; but it was cast into the field, *i.e.* exposed, in order that it might perish. The day of the birth of Jerusalem, *i.e.* of Israel, was the period of its sojourn in Egypt, where Israel as a nation was born, the sons of Jacob who went down to Egypt having multiplied into a nation" (*Keil*).

Ver. 5. "**None eye pitied thee, to do any of these things unto thee.**" "Those who had looked up to Joseph did not even look down with compassion on thee" (*Lange*). Israel in Egypt was an object of contempt. The neglect into which it had fallen might well be compared to the cruel desertion of an infant; for Moses, the type of his people, was actually exposed, and afterwards delivered from threatened death by God's providence

HOMILETICS.

Moral Corruption in the Church.

The prophet is speaking to those who had been brought into covenant with God, and called to serve Him as His people. He is not speaking of the sins of mankind generally, but of those of the Church. Of this moral corruption we are here taught—

I. That it ought to be thoroughly brought home to all concerned. No half measures, or delicate hints, will suffice. Jerusalem must "know her abominations" (ver. 2). 1. *The knowledge of sin is, before all things, necessary to salvation.* It is not sufficient to make a general admission of our heritage in the sin which is natural to our race. There must be a real, heart-felt knowledge of sin as committed by ourselves against God. The sad wounds of our soul must be probed to the very bottom, a painful yet salutary process. 2. *The knowledge of sin cannot be arrived at by our own unaided powers.* However we may lament the sin that is in the world, we are naturally blind to our own real state. Even the

engaging in the outward services of religion may tend still more to blind us, for we are tempted to rest satisfied with them, and, it may be, to regard them as an atonement for our faults and transgressions. And religious people are liable also to the temptation of pleading the motive of a good intention and purpose as a defence for what is clearly wrong. They use the light which is given them, not to shine on the path of duty, but to aid their own wilfulness. The real knowledge of sin must be brought to such from without. It is necessary that the inspired prophet should speak. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to convince of sin.

II. It ought to be revealed in all its enormity. 1. *As sin against the light.* Those who have church privileges, and yet live ungodly lives, are regarded as the heathen in the sight of God (Matt. xviii. 17). 2. *As sin which brings to a most miserable condition.* Such may be compared to an abandoned infant, ready to perish (vers. 4, 5).

(Ver. 2.)

1. A people may be guilty of abominations, and not know nor acknowledge them. "They know not to do right" (Amos iii. 10). When men know not what is right, how can they know what is wrong? They stored up violence and robbery in their palaces, they got wealth by injustice, oppression, laid it up, and thought it well gotten. They know not God (Jer. ix. 3). "They know not the way of the Lord" (Jer. v. 4); therefore their own ways seem good in their eyes. They were blinded, and as they knew not their abominations, so they acknowledged them not (Hos. v. 15). They are, therefore, urged to lay their sin to heart and confess it. 2. There is an unwillingness in sinners to hear of their sins. "Cause Jerusalem to know," &c.; she is against it, but make her to know them. This people were always averse to hear of their sins or duty (Zech. vii. 11, 12; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16). When Stephen told them of their practices (Acts vii. 51, 52) what followed upon it? "They were cut to the heart, and they gnashed upon him with their teeth." And when Christ told them of their sins they derided Him (Luke xvi. 14), told Him that He had "a devil" (John viii. 48). And not only wicked men are unwilling to hear of their sins, but even good men also. When God reproved Jonah, "Doest thou well to be angry?" his reply was, "I do well to be angry, even to death." He thought God did evil in reproving him, that he had more cause to be angry than God had to chide him for his anger. Paul was become an enemy to the Galatians, because he told them the truth, he told them of their sins. Good men do not easily endure to hear of their faults. 3. What God commands the prophets and ministers to do, it matters not how it is taken by the people, they are to do it. It was not for Ezekiel to excuse himself from this service, to object against it, to say they will mock me, despise me, misuse me, hate me, seek my hurt. God commanded, and it was his duty to do it carefully, conscientiously, and faithfully. He must make known their sins to themselves, to the world, let the event be what it will (Isa. lviii. 1). The prophet must not whisper, but cry, and that aloud; it matters not who hears, he must lift up his voice like a trumpet. When men blow trumpets they do it with all their strength, and the sound of it goeth far; so must the prophets utter the sins of the people, and show them their transgressions. (1.) That others may take warning, and not do as they have done (1 Tim. v. 20). (2.) That they may bring the parties to repentance (Jer. xxxiii. 22). How shall sinners come to repentance if they hear not of their sins, if they be not convinced of the sinfulness of them by the prophets and ministers of God? The false prophets hid their sins from them. (3.) That they may deliver their own souls (Ezek. xxxiii. 8, 9). 4. The sins of people are abominations in God's account. Sins are works, but works of iniquity, abominable works, and abominable iniquity (Ps. xiv. 1, liii 1).—*Greenhill.*

ISRAEL'S SALVATION FROM HER SHAME AND MISERY IS DUE TO THE LORD ALONE (vers. 6-14).

Ver. 6. "**And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood.**" Some render, "and saw thee trampled in thy blood." Israel in Egypt was a people trampled upon, utterly despised. "**I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live.**" It was sad to be despised, but the chief danger was that *life* was seriously threatened. From the mouth of God, the word "Live" was a word of power, and was visibly fulfilled in the extraordinary multiplication of Israel. "Jehovah here represents Himself as a traveller who, on passing by, discovers the unsightly and pitiable object which had just been described, and interposes for its rescue. Notwithstanding its pollution, He takes compassion upon it, and saves its life. In this miserable and helpless condition Jehovah found the Hebrews in the land of bondage. Extending the principle involved in the figure beyond the direct teaching of the text, it is strikingly descriptive of the condition of sinners previous to conversion."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 7. "**I have caused thee to multiply as the bird of the field.**" According to the promise (Ex. i. 7, 12). "**Thou art come to excellent ornaments.**" Heb., "Ornament of cheeks," describing youthful freshness and beauty of face. "**Thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown.**" The Heb. word when applied to the breasts means to expand, *lit.* to raise oneself up. "The metaphor is still continued, representing the infant growing up to womanhood, and exhibiting unmistakeable signs of puberty."—(*Henderson.*) '**Whereas thou wast naked and bare.**" "Naked and bare are figurative expressions for still destitute of either clothing or ornaments. This implies something more than the poverty of the people in the wilderness attached to Egypt. Nakedness represents deprivation of all the blessings of salvation with which the Lord endowed Israel and made it glorious, after he had adopted it as the people of his possession in Egypt, Israel was living in a state of nature, destitute of the gracious revelations of God."—(*Keil.*)

Ver. 8. "**Behold thy time was the time of love.**" This is not intended merely to convey the idea that she had arrived at a marriageable age, but also the further thought that she had become an object of affection. "**I spread my skirt over thee and covered thy nakedness.**" "The spreading of the corner of the upper garment and the covering of the nakedness symbolize in general, that He took the miserable, helpless one under His protection, interested Himself in her; specially, however, with the thought of conferring the honour of betrothal, marriage (Ruth iii. 9). This thought is solemnly carried out in the swearing and entering into covenant, by means of which Israel, grown into a nation, now became the peculiar people of Jehovah (Ez. xx. 5, 6; Ex. xix., xx. 2, 5; Deut. v. 2; Eph. v. 32."—(*Lange.*) "There was nothing in Israel that was lovely. It was all pure affection on the part of Jehovah. The advance in the allegory is now to that of the espousals."—(*Henderson.*) "**I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee.**" "An obvious reference to the solemn transactions at Sinai, when Jehovah entered into covenant with the Hebrews, thereby contracting as it were a conjugal relation, by which He pledged Himself to love, provide for, and protect them; while they came under an obligation to love, worship, and obey Him to the exclusion of every rival god. Hence as it follows in the sequel, and so frequently in the Old Testament, idolatry is represented as spiritual adultery, the nation thereby being guilty of a breach of the marriage covenant.'—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 9. "Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil." Preparations for the marriage ceremony, consisting of purification, the putting on of ornaments, and annointing with oil were customary in the East (Esther ii. 9-12). Before the Israelites were permitted to enter into covenant with God they had to undergo a thorough purification (Ex. xix. 14; Jer. ii. 2, 3). "The anointing with oil indicates the powers of the Spirit of God, which flowed to Israel from the divine covenant of grace."—(*Keil.*)

Ver. 10. "Broidered work." Rich garments of many colours, adorned with figures wrought in silver and gold. With such costly garments queens were accustomed to clothe themselves (Psa. xlv. 15). "And shod thee with badger's skin." "This was a kind of skin used by the Hebrews to make an over-covering to the tabernacle (Ex. xxvi. 14); and, as appears from the present verse, used also for shoes; but of what particular animal, has been disputed. The most probable opinion is, that the seal is intended."—(*Henderson.*) "And I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk." "The girding with fine linen refers to the head-band (Ez. xxiv. 17; Ex. xxix. 9; Lev. viii. 13), and is applied by the Targum to the headdress of the priests."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 12. "And I put a jewel on thy forehead." The Hebrew word here rendered, "jewel" properly means a "ring," and the word rendered "forehead" (though sometimes used to denote the countenance or face in general) signifies strictly and properly *the nose*. "The jewellery included not only armlets, nose-rings, and earrings, which the daughters of Israel were generally accustomed to wear, but also necklaces and a crown, as ornaments worn by princesses and queens."—(*Keil.*)

Ver. 13. "Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver." This verse sums up the contents of verses 9–12. "Thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil; and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom." "The food is referred to once more; and the result of the whole is said to have been, that Jerusalem became exceedingly beautiful, and flourished even to royal dignity. The latter cannot be taken as referring simply to the establishment of the monarchy under David, any more than merely to the spiritual sovereignty for which Israel was chosen from the very beginning (Ex. xix. 5, 6). The expression includes both, viz., the call of Israel to be a kingdom of priests, and the historical realisation of this call through the Davidic sovereignty" (*Keil*)

Ver. 14. "And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty." "As a kingdom theirs was distinguishingly flourishing in the days of David and Solomon, the former of which monarchs greatly extended its boundaries and enriched it with the spoils of his victories. The theocracy then reached its highest point of glory, and was of great celebrity among the surrounding nations (1 Kings x.). Still they are reminded that their prosperity and glory were not owing to any merit of their own. It was a 'comeliness' which Jehovah their covenant-God had put upon them. To His unmerited bounty they owed all that they enjoyed" (*Henderson*).

HOMILETICS.

Salvation is of the Lord.

The salvation and advancement of Israel to position and renown among the nations has its parallel in the salvation and exaltation of believers. Consider—

I. The grace of this salvation. Israel is described under the figure of a miserable infant neglected at its birth, and even cast out and left to perish. This people on whom God bestowed His grace, were lying in their own pollutions, and fast sinking into moral death. They were destitute of every ornament and beauty of goodness (vers. 6, 7). There was nothing in them to win the love of admiration or affection, but everything to excite loathing and disgust. When we consider the condition from which Israel was called, we must feel that the salvation of the people was by grace alone. And what does God see in man as a sinner but all that is abhorrent to His own holy nature! If God comes to the help of such it must be by the impulse of a grace which is all His own.

II. The glory of this salvation. The glory of it lies in the fact that it is grace manifested in the most wonderful and excellent way. 1. *It had its source in the love of pity and compassion.* There was nothing in the original condition of Israel to win the love of admiration. It was the love of pity and compassion that saved them. Such a love is worthy of the broad free benevolence of God. It is a love which cannot be overtasked by the worst condition of human sin and misery. The grace of God meets the case of the guilty, and His mercy that of the miserable; and the glory of it lies in the fact, that it springs from pure pity without any merit or claim whatever on the part of its object. 2. *It was a manifestation of that love which desires to give and bless.* These are the essential characteristics of all love which is worthy of that sacred name. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and that blessedness first and above all belongs to God. He is the only blessed One, for He alone is ever giving and never receiving. And what is Creation but the love of God expressing itself in manifold gifts; and what is Redemption but the love of God, as it brings the undeserved gifts of salvation to the souls of men? God's love gave to ancient Israel *a restored life*; "I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live"—gave them *an energy of growth and improvement*—invested them with ornaments and beauty (ver. 7). They also had bestowed upon them by an extraordinary grace the *favours* of God's love, for they were taken into intimate union with Himself (ver. 8). And further, God also gave them influence among the nations of the earth (ver. 14)—that influence which comes from righteousness. They had thus bestowed upon them that love which both gives and blesses. But in this process by which they were raised from sin to holiness, the order is, first—forgiveness; and then the other gifts and blessings of grace. They are first purified from their pollution, and then are anointed (ver. 9). For God must pardon before He can heal; and men must be justified before they can be sanctified. God loves the sinner though vile and miserable but His *favour* is only reserved for those who are washed and sanctified.

The first lesson of this passage is, that the infinite love and pity of the heart of God is the spring and origin of our salvation. Therefore there is no room for pride or boasting on our part. In this matter of salvation, above all things, we must give the glory to God alone.

(Ver. 6.)

I. There is nothing in the creature to move God to show mercy. God saw nothing to incline or move Him to do aught, or bestow aught upon this infant. But there are several things which move men. 1. *Birth and progeny.* Royal and noble births have affected many; David was taken with Saul's daughter (1 Sam. xviii. 17, 18). This moves not God, He poureth contempt upon princes (Job xii. 21). He chooseth the poor to be rich in faith (James ii. 5). Believers are said to be "born not of blood" (John i. 13), which some refer to families of noble and royal blood. "Not many noble are called" (1 Cor. i. 26).

2. *Beauty.* Jacob was affected with the beauty of Rachel; Ahasuerus with the beauty of Vashti (Esth. i. 11). God is not moved with beauty; if we had it, there is nothing in man to affect His eye (Psa. xiv. 3). We are altogether filthy, and God saw them in their blood. 3. *Natural parts prevail with men.* Ahithophel's counsel took much with David and Absalom; Joseph, Daniel, had excellent spirits, great wisdom, and they were advanced thereupon. Learning is persuasive, and conquers many, but parts and learning can do nothing with God (1 Cor. i. 26; Matt. xi. 25). 4. *Profitableness, serviceableness.* So Paul persuades Philemon to take Onesimus, because he would be profitable unto him. Men are taken with men, because they bring in gain unto them. But the Lord is not profited by the righteousness of men (Job. xxxv. 7); He receives nothing at man's hands, and when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants. 5. *Necessity moves men mightily.* It caused Abiathar to give the shew-bread to David (1 Sam. xxi. 6); the necessity of the Church moved the rich to sell their lands and goods to distribute unto every man as they had need (Acts ii. 45). This is no motive unto Divine Majesty. 6. *Hope of proving well draws forth men to do much.* Men do much for others with the hope that they may become instruments of good. But God will give the gifts of Christ for the rebellious, and dwell among them (Psa. lxviii. 18). How rebellious was Manasseh! How did he sin against heaven and earth, yet God had a gift of life for him. To Mary Magdalene and to Zaccheus, Christ said, live, when they were in their blood. He showed mercy to Paul, and bade him live, when he was a persecutor and an injurious person. 7. *Nothing in the godly moves God, all they do is debt* (Luke xvii. 10). The will and deed are of the Lord (Phil. ii. 13).

II. The Lord shows mercy to men when they are in desperate conditions. When this infant was cast out, and lay bleeding to death, God said "Live." When Moses, and other Hebrew children were to be drowned, the Lord delivered them. When in Babylon, all the necks of the Jews were upon the block by Haman's plot and power, the Lord showed them mercy, and said, "Live," The thief upon the cross met with life in the gates of death.

III. When sinners look not after God, He is pleased to look after and find out them. God found out and sought the Jews, when they neither sought nor called; so it is with the Gentiles (Isa. lxv. 1). Both Gentile and Jew had preventing grace, and were sought out of God before ever they sought God. Hence Jerusalem had that promise or title, thou shalt be called, "Sought out" (Isa. lvii. 12).

IV. God hath no need of any people. He passed by, like some great man, that riding forth, finds a poor distressed infant, and out of compassion takes it into his family; not because he needs it, but he will show kindness to it of his own good pleasure. If He needed people or nations He could create them, raise them up from the stones. The Samaritan had no need of the wounded man, but he needed the Samaritan's wine and oil.

V. In bestowing mercies, God is real. This appears from the doubling of the word—"Live," "Live." When there is a doubling of the same word, there the intention, reality, and earnestness of the author speaking is held out (Ez. v. 8; xxxvii. 5, 6; Isa. xl. 1).

VI. When God hath done much for a people, and they are degenerate and ungrateful, the Lord's way of dealing with them is to set before them their original condition and his kindness unto them (Micah vi. 2–5: Deut. xxxii. 6). (*Greenhill*).

Israel's Apostacy from God (vers. 15-34).

EXEGETICAL NOTES. Its origin and nature (vers. 15-22); its magnitude and extent (vers. 23-34).

Ver. 15. The apostacy of Israel is described under the image of whoredom and adultery. "Thou didst trust in thine own beauty." The gifts of God, when they ceased to be recognised as such, became a snare. Israel prostituted them in the service of idolatry. Because of thy renown. "Teaching that the Jews had employed the renown, which through the Divine goodness they had acquired, as a means of seducing neighbouring nations to commit spiritual fornication."—*(Henderson).*

Ver. 16. The "high places" were temples erected upon heights by the side of altars (1 Kings xiii. 32; 2 Kings xvii. 29). In 2 Kings xxiii. 7, the Jewish women are described as wearing hangings to adorn the temples of Astarte. The latter part of the verse expresses the idea that such gross abominations in Israel were altogether unparalleled in the past, as they would be in the future.

Vers. 17–19. "Images of Men." Heb. "Of a male." This may describe idolatry in general, and thus the word "male" would be used as corresponding with the description of Israel as an adulteress. But some expositors think that a reference is made here to a certain abominable form of idolatry. "Scholz and Hävernick understand what were worshipped in the idolatrous service of phallus, or the membrum virile, which the Egyptians regarded as the emblem of fecundity, and which is still licentiously worshipped by the Hindoos under the name of *lingam*."—(*Henderson*).

Vers. 20–22. "To cause them to pass through the fire." A clear reference to Moloch-worship in which children were sacrificed to the idol by burning them. "The passing through was the mode of slaying, and the devouring was the consequence of it. The idols were thought to be present in the fire."—(*Hengstenberg.*)

Vers. 23–27. "An eminent place." The Heb. may be rendered a brothel, or place of prostitution. The word was so understood by the LXX. Thus figuratively the prophet describes their unholy passion for idol-worship. "The natural heights are too far for the people hungering after idols. They wish to plant idolatry in the city thoroughfare, and so build for themselves artificial heights. We must distinguish between the thought and its clothing. The thought is, that the objects of idolatry became the prime impulse of the popular life, by which is to be understood much less religious than political adultery, though both went hand in hand."—(*Hengstenberg.*) "And hast made thy beauty to be abhorred." The Heb. verb in the *Piel* conjugation signifies to abhor, never to cause to be abhorred. To prostitute their beauty was to show their contempt for it. By forsaking God and His Holy worship they showed how little esteem they had for the national honour. "And hast opened thy feet to every one that passed by." "At an earlier period Israel stood, by the situation of their country, which admitted no isolation, in manifold intercourse with the world; but in the time which the prophet has in view they lay in the middle of the contending world-powers—the Asiatic and the African—and were thus in their intervening territory tempted by the force of circumstances to adultery with powerful neighbours."—(*Hengstenberg.*) "The Egyptians, thy neighbours, great of flesh." Heb. "The Sons of Egypt." An euphemism to denote the licentious character of the Egyptian worship. "The sons of Egypt are not its gods, and therefore the reference is to political whoredom. Let it be remem-

bered how in express terms intercourse with Egypt was forbidden to Israel, how return thither is threatened them rather as the worst punishment (Deut. xxviii. 68); and let one compare from the days of Solomon onwards (1 Kings iii. 1, ix. 16, x. 28; 2 Kings xviii.; Isa. xxx. xxxi. 1, xxxvi. 6; Jer. xxxvii. 5, 7).—(*Lange*). "The daughters of the Philistines which are ashamed of thy lewd ways." "The daughters of the Philistians are the Philistian states, corresponding to the representation of Israel as an adulterous wife. The Philistians are mentioned as the principal foes, because Israel fell completely into their power at the end of the period of the Judges (Judges xiii.; 1 Sam. iv.); and they are referred to here, for the deeper humiliation of Israel, as having been ashamed of the licentious conduct of the Israelites, because they adhered to their gods, and did not exchange them for others as Israel had done (Jer. ii. 10, 11).—(*Keil*).

Vers. 28–34. "Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable." "Having got no satisfaction in the African, they betake themselves now to the Asiatic world-power. They long after it, and find no satisfaction even when the longing is realized."—(*Lange*). "Not satisfied with adopting the idolatories of Egypt, the Jews practised those of the more distant Assyrians and Babylonians. They were perfectly insatiable in their lust. Their idolatry was an amalgamation of all the different forms which obtained in the countries around them."—(*Henderson*). "How weak is thine heart." Some render it, "Yet how languishing is thine heart." In this sense we are to understand that sickly craving of lustful desire, which had grown into a disease. Ewald designates the expression as "a biting sarcasm; how great must be the languishing of love!" Others understand it more generally of the tendency of oft-repeated sin to weaken our moral nature. "The influence of sin on the soul is to render it morally impotent. Though it may not deprive it of the powers which are requisite to constitute man a responsible agent, it weakens his principle of action, takes possession of those powers, and forms itself into habits which the individual allows to grow upon him, so that he becomes at last insensible to the operation of the strongest moral motives."—(*Henderson*). "And the contrary is in thee from other women in thy whoredoms." Israel gave presents to its lovers, contrary to the practice of prostitutes in general. The Jews practised idolatry not from the mere love of gain, but from the gratification they found in that sin. They had arrived at that lowest stage of depravity when sin is loved merely for its own sake. "Ezekiel has thus fulfilled the task appointed him in ver. 2, to charge Jerusalem with her abominations. The address now turns to an announcement of the punishment."—(*Keil*).

HOMILETICS.

Israel's Apostacy: An Example of Monstrous Iniquity.

I. It was the prostitution of God's best gifts. "Thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown" (ver. 15). They ceased to recognise their superior endowments as the free and undeserved gifts of God's great favour, and therefore these became a snare to them and the occasion of falling. Their iniquity was beyond that of other nations, because theirs was the sin of a people taken into special covenant with God. It is more than common iniquity—it is monstrous to turn God's gifts into the means of sin (Jude iv.). The sins against the clearest light are the greatest of all.

II. It took the worst possible forms. 1. *They devoted all God's gifts to idols.* (1.) *The common gifts of Providence.* Food of various kinds, represented by "fine flour, and oil, and honey" (ver. 19). (2.) *Luxuries.* "Jewels of gold and silver." With these they made images to be employed in the most degrading forms of idolatry. (3.) *Even their own children.* They gave them up to Moloch-worship, caused them "to pass through the fire" (ver. 21). Such was their infatuation with this idolatry, that they silenced the common instincts of nature, and gave up their own children to the most cruel forms of death. The prophet speaks of their great sins with the utmost force of language when he calls them "abominations." 2. *They took special pains to spread idolatry.* They built idol temples close to the dwellings of the worshippers, so that they might not have to seek them in distant places. They tempted others with all the wiles and artifices of wickedness, "Thou hast opened thy feet to every one that passed by" (ver. 25). With a zeal worthy of a better cause they sought out the worst forms of idolatry among the nations of the earth—The Egyptians (ver. 26), the Assyrians (ver. 28), the Chaldeans (ver. 29). They seemed bent not merely upon imitating, but even surpassing the worst abominations of the heathen around them. 3. *Their lust of idolatry was insatiable.* When they had gained their desire, they refused to be satisfied, and still cried out for more (vers. 28, 29). "How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord God!" (ver. 30). Their lust was glutted until they could feel only the sickly languishing of "an imperious whorish woman." 4. *They loved the sin of idolatry for its own sake.* Not for gain, but because they had a delight in it (vers. 33, 34). 5. *They sinned thus grievously after due chastisement.* God compares himself to a husband who endeavours by means of chastisement to induce his faithless wife to return. The supply of food, clothing, and of all the necessaries and comforts of a wife are diminished. She is even delivered over unto the will of them that hate her (ver. 27). Such was the discipline by which the Lord sought to bring His ancient people to a sense of their folly, and to restore to them the privileges of the faithful. He did not suffer Israel to attain to that glory and power which was their sure portion had they continued to serve the Lord with a perfect heart. He allowed their enemies to triumph over them, so that they had not the undisturbed possession of Canaan. To remain unimproved under the chastisements of God, and not even to feel them, shows a heart in the last stage of hardening. "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved" (Jer. v. 3).

(Vers. 15–19.)

I. Where God bestows choice mercies upon a people, He looks for answerable returns from them. He gave life to the Israelitish state (ver. 6). He multiplied it as the bud of the field (ver. 7). He loved this people, entered into covenant with them, married them unto Himself (ver. 8). He washed away their blood, and anointed them with oil (ver. 9). He gave them costly apparel, fine flour, honey and oil, royal dignity, special beauty, great fame and glory (vers. 10-14); and now expected that they should have lived to Him, and improved all for the honour of His name. "But thou didst trust in thine own beauty," etc. I looked not for this at thy hands; I looked that thou shouldst have been faithful and fruitful in all good works, and been as exemplary for holiness and justice to other nations, as I was exemplary in my mercies towards thee above other nations (Isa. v. 2).

II. Ingratitude in God's people is a provoking sin, and causes God to upbraid them for it. From the beginning of verse 6, to the end of verse 14, which are but nine verses, there is "I" seventeen times, and every mention of it is a matter for upbraiding unto them. When God had made Adam after His image,

planted him in Paradise, given him dominion over all the creatures, for him not to obey one little command was gross ingratitude, provoked the Lord to upbraid him and punish him for it (Gen. iii.) Christ upbraids Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum where His mighty works were done, because they brought not forth fruits answerable, but were impenitent and ungrateful (Matt. xi.)

III. We are very apt to trust in, and be proud of, the mercies God bestows upon us. "Thou did'st trust in thine own beauty." Those things that I gave thee to make thee beautiful, thou hast abused and put too much confidence in. The heart of man is ready to idolize every mercy God gives. There are several mercies we are apt to trust in. 1. *In riches.* The rich man confides in wealth as citizens do in a walled, well fortified, and well built city (Prov. x. 15; Psa. lii. 7; 1 Tim. vi. 17). 2. *In princes and great ones* (Psa. cxlvi. 3; Isa. ii. 22; Jer. xvii. 5; Isa. xxx. 3). 3. *In your own natural excellencies.* "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom," etc. (Jer. ix. 23). "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Prov. xxviii. 26); the heart is the most excellent part of man (See also Prov. iii. 5). 4. *In the ordinances and means of grace* (Jer. vii. 4, 14, 15.

IV. Great renown, through man's corruption, oft proves a snare, occasions great sins. God made this people above all nations, in praise, in name, in honour, that they might be a holy people unto Him (Deut. xxvi. 19). Their renown should have encouraged them unto holiness, and it was an incentive unto looseness. Solomon had great renown abroad in the nations (1 Kings iv. 31); that drew the princes to bestow their daughters upon him. His name made way for unlawful marriages, and they made way for unlawful gods.

V. The most beautiful and renowned church may degenerate, apostatise, and become corrupt. This Israelitish woman was the only spouse of God. He entered into covenant with her, she became His; He put more spiritual beauty and comeliness upon her than upon all the nations, and made her renowned throughout all the world; yet she forsook God, played the harlot, prostituted herself to every idol and idolater. And now where was the Church of God? She "played the harlot with many lovers" (Jer. iii. 1). Here was visible apostacy, visible idolatry, but no true visible Church. Neither was God without a true Church at this time. There were some godly ones in secret, who mourned for the abominations done in the city, temple, and everywhere (Ezek. ix. 4). But these lay hid, and durst not appear in the ways of worship then amongst them. So in Elijah's days. He complained, "The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant," etc. (1 Kings xix. 10); but God had then seven thousand in secret (ver. 18). The true Church may be brought to such a paucity, such a lowness, that there may be no public meetings, or view thereof. The papists say their Church cannot err, especially in things necessary to salvation; and why? because it is the spouse of Christ. Was not this Israelitish Church the spouse of God? And did it not err in the great and weighty things of salvation? Did it not leave God and fall into idolatry, such practices as exclude the kingdom of heaven? What privilege hath the Roman Church more than this had? Whatever papists say or write, their Church hath trusted in her beauty, been proud of her renown, and played the harlot as notoriously as ever Jerusalem did.—*(Greenhill.)*

ISRAEL'S PUNISHMENT WILL CORRESPOND WITH HER SINS. (vers 35–42).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 35, 36. "Because thy filthiness was poured out." Heb. "Because thy brass has been lavished." Brass is used here to signify money. Israel had spent the wealth which God had

given her in the servise of idolatry. "That the Jews, at least those in the exile, as well as classic antiquity, had copper money, follows even from our passage, and is confirmed by Matt. x. 9, Mark xii. 41, where brass occurs directly for money. The paramours are, according to what follows, pre-eminently the world-powers themselves. Along with them are named the heathen gods, whose worship was a consequence of political dependence.—(*Hengstenberg.*) "**And by the blood of thy children which thou didst give unto them.**" They were also guilty of murder in sacrificing their children to Moloch (ver. 20.)

Ver. 37. "**I will gather all thy lovers.**" Chiefly those of Assyria and Babylon. "**With all them that thou hast hated.**" These were the surrounding nations who were always lying in wait for an occasion against Israel. God would gather friend and foe against Jerusalem and use them as instruments to execute His judgments. Israel is to be punished in *kind*. She had cultivated friendship with the heathen and partaken of their iniquities, and now she shall be given up altogether into their power. "**I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness.**" "The public judgment. First of all, the assembling of the lovers as witnesses. She who has dishonoured and brought herself to shame becomes now, by the interposition of God, to the one party an object of loathing, to the other an object of mockery. The last attraction, and what might still have been an object of regard, vanishes. Hävernick refers to the procedure in the case of a married woman suspected of adultery (Num. v. 18)."—(*Lange.*)

Ver. 38. "**And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged.**" This is the explanation of the figurative language employed in the last verse. Israel was to be punished with the punishment of adulterers and murderers. "**And I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy.**" "Thou shalt be turned into blood, so that nothing but blood may be left of thee, and that the blood of fury and jealousy, as the working of the wrath and jealousy of God (compare verse 42). To this end the heathen will destroy all the objects of idolatry, then take from the harlot both clothes and jewellery, and leave her naked, *i.e.* plunder Jerusalem and lay it waste, and, lastly, execute upon her the punishment of death by stoning and by sword; in other words, destroy both city and kingdom."—*(Keil.)*

Ver. 39. "**And leave thee naked and bare.**" "As thou wast before the Lord had mercy on thee (ver. 7). The unfaithful use of the gifts of God inevitably brings on their loss. God cannot be mocked."—*(Hengstenberg.)*

Ver. 40. "**They shall also bring up a company against thee.**" "This may be explained from the ancient mode of administering justice, according to which the popular assembly (Prov. v. 14) sat in judgment on cases of adultery and capital crimes, and executed the sentence, as the law for stoning expressly enjoins (Lev. xx. 2; Num. xv. 36; Deut. xxii. 21). But they are also applicable to the foes, who would march against Jerusalem" *(Keil).* "**And they shall stone thee with stones.**" The usual mode of capital punishment under the Mosaic law, and which was inflicted for the crimes of idolatry, adultery, and murder. This doom pronounced upon Jerusalem was accomplished literally, for she was "stoned" before she was burned (Jer. xxxiii. 4). "**With their swords.**" Slaying with the sword was a mode of punishment adopted when there were many criminals to be put to death. It was also the doom of those who seduced men to apostacy (Deut. xiii. 12–15).

Ver. 41. "**And execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women.**" "The many women are the many heathen nations, according to the

description of Jerusalem or Israel as an unfaithful wife."—(*Keil.*) "As it is the greatest punishment to an adulterous woman to be exposed in her sin before the eyes of other women; so will the severest portion of Israel's punishment be, that it will stand exposed in its sin before the eyes of all other nations."—(*Klieforth.*) Concerning the burning of the houses of Jerusalem with fire, see 2 Kings xxv. 8, 9. "**And thou also shalt give no hire any more.**" "Because thou wilt have no more lovers; wilt, on the whole, after the dissolution of thy national independance, be no more in a condition which admits of impure intercourse with the world-powers."—(*Hengstenberg.*)

Ver. 42. "**So will I make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee.**" "The jealousy ceases because it has found its satisfaction in their punishment, and exhausted itself therein, as the fire ceases when it has consumed its fuel."—(*Hengstenberg.*) "The Divine justice comes to an end in its character of *jealousy*—in other words, as the injured faithfulness and love of Israel's husband. The *departing* of the jealousy might, perhaps, by comparison with Isaiah xi. 13, show grace in the background; but the connection with what follows requires rather a thought like Hos. ii. 4. Jehovah gives up the adulterous whorish wife."—(*Lange.*)

HOMILETICS.

The Punishment of Apostacy.

I. The loathsome nature of the sin is made manifest. The sin which the children of Israel had committed by their idolatry is called by its right name. It was the breaking of the sacred marriage-covenant into which God had entered with His people. All what whoredom and adultery is in the social state, all what filthiness is in the morals and manners of a people, such was their sin in the sight of God (ver. 38). Israel was guilty of unfaithfulness of the worst kind. God had given the nation the privileges of an espoused wife, but she sinned with many lovers, thus despising the great grace which had called her to such distinction and honour. God's punishments sometimes begin by revealing our sin to us in all its real vileness. The very conviction of sin is a painful wound—the arrows of the Almighty within our spirit.

II. The very objects of sinful desire are turned into the instruments of punishment. "I will gather all thy lovers with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness" (ver. 37). Those who contributed to her sin shall be made the instruments of her punishment. Sinful love, sooner or later, changes into hate. The boon companions of the profligate turn out to be his bitterest enemies. They thus become a scourge in the hands of God to chastise him for his iniquity. There is no true honour amongst transgressors, for their life is founded upon a falsehood. And as God employed as a scourge for His people those who once were friends, He will also employ for chastisement those who were always enemies. "And with them that thou hast hated." Those with whom the children of Israel sinned would make common cause with their enemies for their punishment.

III. The punishment will correspond with the sin. 1. *In degree* They were to be punished as murderers and adulterers, for they had sinned "as women that break wedlock and shed blood" (ver. 38). Stoning was the punishment of adultery, and this threat was literally fulfilled upon Jerusalem, for she was stoned before she was burned (Jer. xxxiii. 4). Their sin was great, and therefore their punishment, so great that even God's fury is represented as

being satisfied upon them, and quite brought to a pause (ver. 42). They could no further go in iniquity, and so God's fury is represented as ceasing; by which we are to understand that it rested upon them. He left them to their fate. God can bring it about that we shall be able to sin no further. 2. *In kind.* Their sin was public, and so their shame and their judgment were public. Their sin was unfaithfulness towards God, and they are punished by the unfaithfulness of men. They cast God off, and men cast them off. That law which is true of individual man is true also of nations, that the very things which they sow they shall also reap.

(Vers. 39–42).

1. *God's hatred is so great against idolatry and idolators that He will not endure the places where they have used idolatrous worship.* The places where they sinned must be destroyed, broken, utterly razed and ruined. Hezekiah is commended for four things; and the first is for removing the high places; then for breaking the images, cutting down the groves, and breaking the brazen serpent. 2. *When we abuse the mercies of God, we give Him cause to take them away.* They decked their high places with their garments (ver. 16); they made images of their jewels (ver. 17). Here God threatens to take away both the one and the other. He would give them into their hands who should rob them of their fair jewels, and strip them of all their clothes (Isa. xlii. 22). "And leave thee naked and bare." Before, in ver. 8, it is said, that God covered her nakedness. He found her naked, and now He would leave her naked and bare. 3. *When God hath showed much kindness to a people, and they have been ungrateful, He will reduce them to their former condition.* God did much for Ephraim, yet he was ungrateful, forgot God, went out to other lovers (Hos. ii. 2, 3). God had spread His skirt over this Jewish woman, clothed her with embroidered silk and fine linen, decked her with choice ornaments and jewels, put His comeliness upon her; but she abused all His bounty and love, proved ungrateful and whorish, and therefore He would put her into her first condition, strip her of all, and leave her naked. She came out of captivity, she should now go into captivity; she was cast out, and now she should be cast out again; she was poor, beggarly, and had nothing, and should be made so again. 4. *When judgments are executed upon a backsliding people, then God is at rest and is satisfied.* When this woman, this Jewish state, fell into the hands of enemies, was plundered and spoiled, and all her glory laid in the dust; then God caused His fury to rest, His jealousy to depart, then He was quiet, and angry no more. Before judgment be thoroughly executed, God is troubled and restless; but when it is done, He is pacified, comforted, as it is in Ezek. v. 13. Before Jonah had judgment passed upon him, there was a great wind, and a mighty tempest in the sea. The Lord's anger was let out. But when Jonah was sent, and cast into the sea—justice done—it is said the sea ceased from her raging. The Lord first ceased from His fury, He was pacified, and manifested it by stilling of the seas. God would bring the Assyrians upon the Jews and what then? "The indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction" (Isa. x. 25).—*(Greenhill.)*

This dire judgment is just; for Israel has not only forgotten God's undeserved favour to her in her election, but has even surpassed both Samaria and Sodom in her abominations.

(Vers. 43–52).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 43. "Hast fretted Me in all these things." Instead of regarding their calamities as the just punishment of their sin, they raged against the Lord. The judgments that ought to have led

them to repentance only served to make them desperate, and to plunge them into still greater depths of apostacy. "**And thou shalt not commit this lewdness above all thine abominations.**" "Lewdness and abomination are not in themselves different: the thought is, that the measure of the lewdness and abomination is now full—that it is time for the punishment to enter into the place of sin."—(*Hengstenberg.*) "We must explain the words from Lev. xix. 29, where the toleration by a father of the whoredom of a daughter is designated as *Zimmâh*. If we adopt this interpretation, Jehovah says that He has punished the spiritual whoredom of Israel, in order that He may not add another act of wrong to the abominations of Israel, by allowing such immorality to go unpunished. If he did not punish, He would commit Zimmâh Himself,—in other words, would make himself accessory to the sins of Israel."—(*Keil.*)

Ver. 44. "**Behold every one that useth proverbs shall use this proverb against thee, saying, as is the mother, so is her daughter.**" "Her abominable life is so conspicuous, that it strikes every one, and furnishes occasion for proverbial sayings. The daughter is of course Jerusalem, as the representative of Israel. The mother is the Canaanitish race of Hittites and Amorites, whose immoral nature had been adopted by Israel."—(*Keil.*)

Ver. 45. "**Thou art thy mother's daughter that loveth her husband and her children; and thou art the sister of thy sisters, which loveth their husbands, and their children; your mother was an Hittite, and your father an Amorite.**" Here Jehovah is represented as the husband, not only of Israel, but also of the other nations. In their case, also, idolatry was apostacy from God who first gave them that knowledge of Himself which they were not willing to retain. Keil notes that Theodoret has explained it correctly in this way: "He shows by this, that He is not the God of Jews only, but of Gentiles also: for God once gave oracles to them, before they chose the abominations of idolatry. Therefore he says that they also put away both the husband and the children by denying God, and slaying the children to demons."

Ver. 46. "**Thine elder sister is Samaria . . . thy younger sister is Sodom.**" "Samaria and Sodom are called sisters of Jerusalem, not because both cities belonged to the same mother-land of Canaan, for the origin of the cities does not come into consideration here at all, and the cities represent the kingdoms, as the additional words, "her daughters," that is to say, the cities of a land or kingdom dependent upon the capital, clearly prove. Samaria and Sodom, with the daughter cities belonging to them, are sisters of Jerusalem in a spiritual sense, as animated by the same spirit of idolatry. The Heb. ought to be rendered, "**Thy great sister is Samaria . . . . and thy sister, who is smaller than thou, is Sodom.**" Samaria is called the greater sister of Jerusalem, and Sodom the smaller sister. This is not equivalent to the older and the younger, for Samaria was not more deeply sunk in idolatry than Sodom, nor was her idolatry more ancient than that of Sodom" *(Keil).* The expressions "left hand," "right hand" are employed, because the Orientals regarded the East as the principal point of the heavens. Hence the left would designate the North, and the right the South, the direction in which Sodom had lain.

Ver. 47. "**Thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways.**" Jerusalem had greater guilt, because she was distinguished by greater religious privileges than these cities. She had the temple, the sacrifices, Divinely appointed priests, and the law. In her midst God was worshipped once in the beauty of holiness.

Ver. 48. "**Sodom, thy sister hath not done . . . . as thou hast done.**" Compare Sam. iv 6; Matt. xi. 24.

Ver. 49. "Pride, fulness of bread and abundance of idleness was in her." Prosperity proves dangerous to virtue, idleness leads to temptation and to every sin. Moses had forwarned Israel against these dangers (Deut. vi. 11, 12; compare Hos. xiii. 6). Idleness predisposes men to infidelity (Is. xxxii. 9, 11; Jer. xxii. 21). "Neither did she strengthen the hands of the poor and needy." The "cry" of the oppressed in Sodom was the great reason for her destruction. Such a cry had also come forth from Jerusalem.

Ver. 50. "Therefore I took them away as I saw good." Heb., "According to what I saw." "This points to Gen. xviii. 21. God conducts the inspection by His angels." —(*Hengstenberg.*)

Ver. 51. "And hadst justified thy sisters in all thine abominations." "To justify the crimes of others is a Hebrew mode of speech, denoting, to make them appear comparatively innocent by the side of others, accompanied with much more aggravating circumstances."—*(Henderson.)* Jerusalem had a longer probation than Samaria, and had been warned by the example of Samaria's punishment. Yet she committed worse crimes than those which prevailed in Samaria after Jehu had suppressed Baal-worship.

Ver. 52. "Be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters." "Judah had concurred from the heart in the Divine judgment on Sodom and Samaria, and exalted herself above them on this account, as the Pharisee in the Gospel. In the condemnation of her sisters she had condemned herself (Rom. ii. 1). Jerusalem has "justified" her sisters, inasmuch as she has behaved worse than they, and so retributive punishment must overtake her also."—*(Hengstenberg).*

HOMILETICS.

God's Judgments upon Israel Justified.

God's judgments for sin will at last be acknowledged as just even by sinners themselves. But even in this world we can see enough of God's righteous dealings to assure us that He will be clear when He judges. The prophets of Israel were concerned that men should know that God's ways are equal—that His punishments were not arbitrary, but just. His judgments upon Israel could be clearly justified.

I. They sinned against a great and extraordinary grace. The Lord had been with this nation from its youth up. He had adopted this people, had made known Himself to them, had distinguished them above all others by gifts of knowledge and of privilege. The duties and customs of the pure worship of Jehovah were made known to them. They had every reason to worship God alone, for they were in possession of the purest form of religion known to mankind, and they ought to have been superior to every temptation to forsake that religion for the debasing forms of idolatry around them. But they forgot their high calling. "Thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth" (ver. 43). They had displeased a personal God who could feel the wrongs done to Him by His creatures. "Thou hast fretted me in all these things."

II. They surpassed other nations in iniquity. Samaria and Sodom were punished, and they had not sinned against such great light and privilege. "Thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways" (ver. 47). The people of Israel would reckon themselves as saints when compared with Sodom and

Samaria, but how different was God's judgment! They had been warned against the sins of Sodom; yet they had done worse, for more was given to them and more would be required (Deut. vi. 11, 12; comp. Hos. xiii. 6).

III. They are condemned out of their own mouth. "Thou also which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they; they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters" (ver. 52). In the condemnation of her sisters she had condemned herself. Israel had nothing to answer; for the same judgments upon others, which they regarded as just, were now visited upon themselves with equal justice (Rom. ii. 1). Every sinner will be brought, at last, to admit the justice of God in his condemnation. He will be confounded,—have literally nothing to answer. When men see the awful reality of things they are forced into the terrible silence of conviction.

(Ver. 49.)

I. When a man is said to be idle. 1. *When he doth nothing, is unemployed* (Matt. xx. 3). The Greek word for "idle" means a man without work. Solomon's sluggard would not plough by reason of the cold (Prov. xx. 4). 2. *When they do not what they should do.* He is idle who does not do God's work. There is a work of God's appointment for the day, which you ought to take notice of, and do. "There are some among you which work not at all, but are busy-bodies" (2 Thess. iii. 11), doing no work, yet working about everywhere. 3. *When they do not so much as they ought to do, but are lazy in doing little.* When men put not forth themselves to do what they ought to do in conscience, and according to right reason, they are justly said to be idle (Rom. xii. 11; Eccl. ix. 10; Prov. xviii. 9).

II. The evil of this sin. 1. *It is against the end of man's creation.* God made man for labour when he was in a state of innocency (Gen. ii. 15). He must not be idle there, taking his pleasure in a paradise. And after the Fall, in the sweat of his face he was to eat bread. It is the end of man's creation and birth to be doing. 2. *It is a sin against the light of nature, which puts every thing upon motion.* The heavens, with the glorious lights thereof, move and are constant in their motions (Psa. xix. 5). The ant is a very little creature, but exceedingly laborious. So the bee is little in bulk, but great in employment, and wonderfully busy. These creatures, with many others, confute the sluggard daily, preach down idleness and call for action. 3. *It puts God's family out of order.* The world is God's family, and he hath appointed men unto some employment in it. As a wise artist makes no wheel in a clock, but to move and help on the general work; and if one wheel stands, it is out of order and hinders all the rest. Idle persons are disorderly persons (1 Thess. v. 14). 4. *It sets a man among the dead.* An idle man is both unsavoury and inactive. The poorest and meanest man in the world that follows a calling, and is laborious in it, is better than the most eminent that doth nothing. One is living, and the other a dead man. 5. *Idleness exposes a man to variety of temptations.* It lays him open to Satan, for a man unemployed is like a city without walls and gates whither any enemy may easily have entrance (Ez. xxxviii. 11). An idle man is like a vessel which is empty, any one that comes to it may put in what he will; so Satan pours into idle persons what liquor he pleases. Those who are out of God's work are most exercised with the devil's. 6. *Idleness is the mother and nurse of our most dangerous enemies, viz.: lusts.* Standing waters corrupt soonest. Among the Sodomites was abundance of idleness and abundance of lusts, which fight and war against the soul. And

what madness is it for a man to harbour and feed the enemies that seek his life. In doing nothing men learn to do ill. 7. *Poverty and beggary are the issues of idleness.* Solomon tells the sluggard that his "poverty shall come as one that travelleth, and his want as an armed man" (Prov. vi. 11). He lieth still, but poverty is up and marching towards him. He is without defence, but that comes armed. The meaning is, poverty will come upon an idle and slothful person suddenly and irresistibly. "Drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags" (Prov. xxiii. 21). 8. *Idleness is such a sin as exempts a man from the protection of the angels.* He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways" (Psa. xci. 11). What ways? Those which are according to His will, which His providence leads unto, not in the ways of sin. A man that is idle is in the devil's way, not in God's way. Idle persons that have no calling go out from God and the guard of His angels. If these feared God, they would walk in a calling, and the angels of God would be about them (Psa. xxxiv. 7). Faith is a working grace, witness Heb. xi.; 1 Tim. v. 8. 9. *Idle persons are burdensome creatures.* The fig-tree was a burden to the ground where it stood (Luke xiii. 7). It was a burden to the garden, to the gardener, to the other trees, to the lord and master of all. "Why stand ye here all the day idle? You do no good to ourselves, none to your neighbours, none to the public, none to posterity, nor bring any glory to God." 10. *It is a wasting of precious time, a hiding of our talent.* Time, that is given us to get grace, to work out our salvation, to glorify God. This the idle person squanders away. Such are not minding the apostolical rule, "See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time" (Eph. v. 15, 16). The man who had one talent would not use it, but hid it in the earth. "Thou wicked and slothful servant" (Matt. xxv. 25, 26). Thus wickedness and sloth go together. When Joseph's brethren came into Egypt, and were before Pharaoh, the first question he asked them was, "What is your occupation?" (Gen. xlvii. 3). This was a good question of a king, when strangers were to come and dwell in his land, to know whether they had any calling, could get their livings, and not be burdensome to his kingdom and subjects.—*(Greenhill.)*

But these terrible punishments are not to be the end of the Lord. He will remember His ancient Covenant, and bring His people out of misery, so that they shall attain to the glory which He had promised them. They must however, reach this through humility for the restoration of Sodom and Samaria are also announced. Hence all boasting on the part of Israel is excluded.

(Vers. 53–63.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 53. "When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them." "The promise commences with an announcement of the restoration, not of Jerusalem, but of Sodom and Samaria. The two kingdoms, or peoples, upon which judgment first fell, shall also be the first to receive mercy; and it will not be till after then that Jerusalem, with the other cities of Judah, will also be restored to favour, in order that she may bear her disgrace, and be ashamed of her sins (ver. 54); that is to say, not because Sodom and Samaria have borne their punishment for a longer time, but to the deeper shaming, the more complete humiliation of Jerusalem. The Hebrew expression means, "to turn the captivity," not "to bring back the captives;" and it is here used in a figurative sense for *restitutio in statum integritatis.* No carrying away took place in the case of Sodom."—*(Keil)*

Ver. 54. "In that thou art a comfort unto them." "By bearing disgrace, *i.e.*, by its endurance of well-merited and disgraceful punishment, Jerusalem consoles her sisters, Samaria and Sodom; and that not merely by fellowship in misfortune, but by the fact that from the punishment endured by Jerusalem, both Samaria and Sodom can discern the righteousness of the ways of God, and find therein a foundation for their hope, that the righteous God will bring to an end the merited punishment as soon as its object has been attained." *(Keil.)*

Ver. 55. "When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former estate." "If Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom, are to be viewed as symbolical of the surrounding people whose centre they formed, or with whom they stood connected, no difficulty will arise relative to the restoration of Sodom. If we regard her as the representative of the Ammonites and Moabites, the descendants of Lot, we shall here have only a parallel prediction to Jer. xlviii. 47; xlix. 6. However obscure the lights of history relative either to the captivity or the restoration of the nations beyond the Dead Sea, there can be little doubt that they participated more or less in the fate of the Jews, to whose country they lay contiguous. That most of the ten tribes of which Samaria had been the capital were restored under Cyrus, is now generally admitted. The restoration of all the three classes of people is here predicted to take place at the same time."—*(Henderson.)*

Ver. 56. "For thy sister Sodom was not mentioned by thy mouth in the day of thy pride." They took no heed of the warning of Sodom's example. Boasting themselves as "The Temple of the Lord," they thought that they needed it not (Jer. vii. 4).

Ver. 57. "As at the time of thy reproach of the daughters of Syria." "By the reproach of the cities of Syria, was not meant anything derogatory to the character of those cities nationally considered, but the indignity offered by the Syrians to the Jews, when, under Rezin, they invaded the land of Judah (2 Kings xv. 37; Is. vii. 1–9). That this is the construction to be put upon the words is evident from the parallelism, in the corresponding member of which the manner in which the Jews had been treated by the Philistines is mentioned. Compare for the insults offered by both, Is. ix. 11, 12. —*(Henderson.)*

Ver. 58. "Thou hast borne thy lewdness and thine abominations." Jerusalem would bear the guilt of these iniquities, and would know how great that burden was when she would be called upon to atone for her wrong-doing.

Ver. 59. "I will even deal with thee as thou hast done." In mercy Jehovah would "walk contrary unto them," so that they might be humbled and thus brought to repentance. "Which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant." "Despising the oath points back to Deut. xxix. 11, 12, where the renewal of the covenant concluded at Sinai is described as an entrance into the covenant and oath which the Lord then made with His people. But even if Israel has faithlessly broken the covenant, and must bear the consequent punishment, the unfaithfulness of man can never alter the faithfulness of God. This is the link of connection between the resumption and further expansion of the promise in ver. 60 and the closing words of ver. 59. The remembrance of His covenant is mentioned in Lev. xxvi. 42–45 as the only motive that will induce God to restore Israel to favour again, when the humiliation effected by the endurance of punishment has brought it to a confession of its sins."—*(Keil.)*

Ver. 60. "Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish

unto thee an everlasting covenant." "The covenant which God concluded with Israel in the day of its youth, *i.e.*, when he led it out of Egypt, He will establish as an everlasting covenant. Consequently it is not an entirely new covenant, but simply the perfecting the old one for everlasting duration. For the fact itself, compare Isa. lv. 3, where the making of the everlasting covenant is described as granting the steadfast mercies of David, *i.e.*, as the fulfilment of the promise given to David (2 Sam. vii). This promise is called by David himself an everlasting covenant, which God had made with him (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). And the assurance of its everlasting duration was to be found in the fact that this covenant did not rest upon the fulfilment of the law, but simply upon the forgiving grace of God (compare ver. 63 with Jer. xxxi. 31–34)." —(*Keil*).

Ver. 61. "Then shalt thou remember thy ways and be ashamed." They would be ashamed when they saw the other nations associated with them in the enjoyment of the same blessings. "I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant." The covenant to which they assented at Horeb excluded all other nations from its benefits (Ex. xxiv. 7). The blessings which were to come upon all nations would flow from the earlier promise which God made to Abraham (Gal. iii. 13, 14).

Ver. 62. "And I will establsh My covenant with thee." This was the old covenant made with Abraham, wherein Christ was promised, who was to bless all nations. That was a covenant purely of blessing, and in the form of it entirely unconditional (Gal. iii. 17).

Ver. 63. "And never open thy mouth because of thy shame." This would be the shame of the penitent, who is overwhelmed with a sense of God's extraordinary goodness, and of his own foolishness and ingratitude (Rom. iii. 19).

HOMILETICS.

God's Purpose of Mercy towards Israel.

I. It would not be defeated by the greatness of their sin. Israel had sinned against the clearest light, and in spite of great gifts and priviliges. Their sin was greater than the common iniquity of the nations around them, for it was ingratitude and rebellion against the living God. Yet this did not overtask God's infinite mercy, or close the door of hope against them for ever. With Him there is plenteous redemption. The gospel offers salvation to the worst of sinners, even to those who like Israel, have sinned against the greatest light.

II. Its strength lay in God's ancient covenant with them. It was the old covenant which God would now call to mind, that which He made with them when He first chose them as a people destined to accomplish His purpose of salvation for the world. In the meantime they were punished according to their works, which was *justice*. But, in the end, His *grace* would deal with them according to His mercy secured by His old covenant (ver. 60). Faith in God's unchanging goodness was David's comfort when he uttered his "last words." He remembered many failures, and how he and his house had fallen far short of their high calling, but his soul stood firmly upon this rock, "Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). Thus David confessed that his house was no suitable home for Israel's Great Ruler, but he had strong faith that grace would prevail over

all this unworthiness. And now grace begins the work of reconciliation, of re-establishment. God had not broken His covenant, and now He will make the first advance towards its renewal and fulfilment. All would be seen to be of grace, and not of merit; and, therefore, there can be no ground of boasting on the part of Israel. God's purpose of mercy towards mankind, in Jesus Christ, is intended to prevail over all their sin. The grace displayed in redemption is sufficient for the largest designs of mercy.

III. It would be accomplished through their humiliation. 1. *They would be brought to see their own sin in all its magnitude.* They would remember the past with shame, and the sense of God's infinite mercy displayed in their forgiveness would close their mouths in utter astonishment. They would be both ashamed and confounded (vers. 61-63). 2. *They would be put to shame by God's dealings with other nations.* The restoration of Sodom and Samaria was also promised (vers. 53, 54). Nations which they thought were for ever beyond the reach of Divine mercy were about to be blessed. This great purpose of restoration is fully accomplished in the Gospel dispensation. God chose from His people, Israel, the apostles who were to preach the Gospel, "Salvation is of the Jews." They were the people appointed to spread the glad tidings of salvation to the heathen. The old Covenant would expand into the large and unchangeable purpose of God's mercy in the Gospel. From Jerusalem is to go forth the word of mercy that is to save the world. Thus in the end, it will be seen that God's love is not partial, but contemplates the larger purpose of bringing the means of salvation within the reach of all.

(Vers. 53, 54).

But how could a restoration of Sodom and her daughters (Gomorrah, etc.) be predicted, when the destruction of these cities was accompanied by the sweeping away of all their inhabitants from off the face of the earth? Many of the commentators have attempted to remove the difficulty by assuming that Sodom here stands for the Moabites and Ammonites, who were descendants of Lot, who escaped from Sodom. But the untenableness of such an explanation is obvious, from the simple fact that the Ammonites and Moabites were no more Sodomites than Lot himself And the view expressed by Origen and Jerome, that Sodom is a typical name, denoting heathenism generally, is also unsatisfactory. The way in which Sodom is classed with Samaria and Jerusalem, and the special reference to the judgment that fell upon Sodom (vers. 49, 50), point undeniably to the real Sodom. The heathen world comes into consideration only so far as this, that the pardon of a heathen city, so deeply degraded as Sodom, carries with it the assurance that mercy will be extended to all heathen nations. We must therefore take the words as referring to the literal Sodom. Yet we certainly cannot for a moment think of any earthly restoration of Sodom. For even if we could conceive of a restoration of the cities that were destroyed by fire, and sunk into the depths of the Dead Sea, it is impossible to form any conception of an earthly and corporeal restoration of the inhabitants of those cities, who were destroyed at the same time; and in this connection it is chiefly to them that the words refer. This does not by any means prove that the thing itself is impossible, but simply that the realization of the prophecy must be sought for beyond the present order of things, in one that extends into the life everlasting.—(*Keil*).

Sodom represents the collective heathen world standing in like relations with her. That great crushing judgments will fall upon the whole heathen world no less than on Sodom itself is the uniform announcement of the prophets, also of Ez., in ch. xxv. and xxvi; so that the remark, that "Sodom is not a type of heathendom on this account, because heathendom does not need to be restored,"

is not to the point. The representative character of Sodom lies in the nature of the thing. If God pities the most notorious sinners among the heathen, how should He not pity all? And it is confirmed by ch. xlvii. 18, where the sea introduced in place of Sodom is a symbol of the world dead in sins. Sodom also stands frequently elsewhere in the O.T. as a representative of deep corruption (Deut. xxxii. 32; Isa. i. 10; Jer. xxiii. 14). But all doubt is excluded by ver. 61. There the representative character of Sodom is expressly affirmed. Yet we may not exclude even Sodom itself from salvation. The special references to it are too strong for this (comp. vers. 49, 50). Michaelis says:—"As Samaria and Jerusalem, so must Sodom also, it appears, be taken literally." As a restoration of the city is not to be thought of, its inhabitants swept away by the judgment can only be the object of salvation; and we have here an allusion to a continuance of the arrangements of grace after death for those for whom on earth salvation did not attain to its highest completion, the O. T. basis for 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21; iv. 6, especially for the latter passage; also for Matt. xii. 41, 42, a passage that indeed only indirectly leads to the same result. —(*Hengstenberg*).

(Ver. 62).

"I will establish my covenant with thee." Men once sensible of breach with God are not easily induced to believe that God will bestow great mercies upon them. The Lord, therefore, out of His abundant kindness, doubles the promise of making and establishing His covenant with Jerusalem, so that her fears and disputes may cease, and she be ascertained thereof. "Thou shalt know that I am the Lord." The Heb. word signifies to know, to acknowledge, to understand, to be certain, and properly refers to the mind and understanding. The knowledge here meant is a saving knowledge; for He speaks not of that knowledge which arises from afflictions and judgments, of which He had oft spoken before. Thirteen times the Lord saith, that they should know that He was the Lord. But this was by His judgments. Here He speaks of such knowledge as springs from a fountain and foundation of mercy. "Thou shalt know Me," *i.e.* in another manner than thou didst before; thou shalt know Me spiritually, with a knowledge of faith and salvation (John vii. 17; x. 4). This differs from a legal and literal knowlege, for—1. *It is a more distinct knowledge of God.* Human knowledge is more mixed, dark, and confused. Every ungodly man's light is darkness (Job x. 22). But he who hath light from God in covenant, his light is clear. "The light of the righteous rejoiceth" (Prov. xiii. 9). If it were confused and obscure, it would not rejoice. "The wisdom from above is pure" (James iii. 17); and the more pure, the more clear, the more distinct. 2. *It is a savoury, relishing knowledge, the soul is affected with it.* "Taste and see that the Lord is good." The true knowledge and taste of God is as sweet as any gain, as ever manna was. "His fruit was sweet to my taste." His knowledge hath a savour in it (2 Cor. ii. 14). 3. *It is a deep-rooted and well-settled knowledge.* The Lord puts wisdom in the inward parts, and gives understanding to the hearts of those with whom He strikes His covenant (Job xxxviii. 36). "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts" (2 Cor. iv. 6). Not in our heads only, not *on* our hearts only, but *in* our hearts. God puts and writes His law in the hearts of His people (Jer. xxxi. 33). Wicked men have knowledge and light in their heads, but darkness in their hearts. 4. *It is distinguishable from other kinds of knowledge by the effects* (1.) *It is peaceable.* It causeth men to live peaceably (James iii. 17; Isa. xi. 9). When men know God savingly, they love peace, and pursue peace; but when knowledge is literal, they are contentious and bitter. (2) *It humbleth much.* The more men know God in His holiness,

glory, and goodness, the more humble they will be (Ezek. xx. 42, 43). When Job had a clear and spiritual sight of God, he abhorred himself in dust and ashes (Job xlii. 5, 6). In like manner the prophet Isaiah and Paul (Isa. vi. 5; 1 Cor. xv. 8, 9). (3.) *It is working and powerful.* Like fire, it consumes the lusts of men's hearts, and separates the dross of their spirits. The truth purifies the soul (1 Pet. i. 22). Divine knowledge keeps under what hinders practice, and leads out the soul to action (Psa. cix. 34). Men have not the true knowledge of God when their lusts overpower them, and make them disobedient. (4.) *Trust and confidence in the Lord.* The knowledge we speak of hath certainty in it, and causeth venturing (Psa. ix 10). They that know God spiritually, His truths and promises, covenant, faithfulness, will resign up themselves to Him and lean upon Him. "In the Lord, Jehovah, is everlasting strength" (Isa. xxvi. 4). When a man hath the true, real, and clear knowledge of this he will trust in God. David had the right knowledge of God when he said, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him will I trust" (Psa. xci. 2).—*(Greenhill.)*

(Ver. 63).

1. *Godly sorrow and shame for sin arises from a right knowledge of God in the covenant of grace.* If the knowledge be spiritual and evangelical, the fruit of the covenant, men's repentance will be suitable; sanctified knowledge will produce sanctified shame, sorrow, and tears (Zech. xii. 10). When men are in covenant with God, and have the spiritual knowledge of His love and bounty, in giving Christ to take away sin, and look upon Him in His piercings and sufferings for their sins, then they will mourn with a great but spiritual mourning, which is the most kindly and acceptable. 2. *Those who rightly know God in the covenant of grace, will not murmur against Him for any of His dealings with them.* They will be silent and submissive before Him. They know God is infinitely wise, just, and holy; that all their afflictions and chastisements are exceeding short of what they deserve; that nothing comes to pass without His Providence; that He can wrong none; that He can use unholy instruments holily, and hath holy ends in all His ways. Job met with very hard things; but knowing God the right way, he opened not his mouth against Him but for Him. So David, "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it" (Psa. xxxix. 9). He was silent, and patiently submitted unto the hand of God; he neither accused Him, nor excused himself. If I be reproached, persecuted, afflicted any way, I know it is Thy doing, and I will be dumb. Those who have spiritual knowledge of God, and spiritual sorrow for their sins are most silent. In whatsoever condition they be cast, they will say with the Church, "We will bear the indignation of the Lord, because we have sinned against Him" (Micah vii 9). 3. *Sin is such an evil as provokes God.* "When I am pacified towards thee." If there were not offence, no place would be found for pacification, for where this has to be made provocation hath gone before. Sin provokes God bitterly, and makes him angry every day (Hos. xii. 14; Psa vii. 11). To kindle His anger, even but a little, is a dangerous thing (Psa ii. 12). Paul knew it when he said, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy; are we stronger than He?" (1 Cor. x. 22). 4. *Though sin do provoke God greatly and bitterly, yet He is to be pacified.* He is not implacable. "He will not keep His anger for ever." His mercy endures for ever, but not His anger; His wrath is momentary, but His kindness is everlasting (Isa. liv. 8). Aaron made an atonement for the people (Num. xvi. 46). Phineas turned away his wrath (Num. xxv. 11). Moses prevailed with God, and pacified Him when he was very angry (Ex. xxxii. 14). And when the people

were full of sin, had greatly trespassed, "He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath (Psa. lxxviii. 38). 5. *God being pacified toward a people is a great mercy.* This appears in two things: (1.) *All that hath offended is passed by and forgiven.* "For all that thou hast done." Not for one, or two, or a hundred things done, but for all done; the idolatry, oppression, pride, fulness of bread, idleness, neglect of the poor, injustice, profaneness, etc. Here is the greatness of Divine grace; be sins never so great, old, many, they are all done away. (2.) *He is so pacified, that He will not be angry with them again for those evil deeds.* The Heb. word denotes such a covering of their sins, so that they cannot be easily seen again; an expiation, a blotting out (Isa. xliii. 25). "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none, and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found" (Jer. l. 20).—(*Greenhill*).

The Humiliation and Exaltation of the House of David (Chap xvii).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The word of prophecy in this chapter is introduced in the way of a riddle and a parable (ver. 2). The parable itself is told in vers. 1-10. In vers. 11-21, we have the interpretation of it and its application to King Zedekiah. In vers. 22-24, we have the prophecy of the exaltation of David's house and its necessary connection with the glory of Messiah's kingdom. By the alliance of Zedekiah with Egypt, the people hoped to regain the ancient glory of Israel. The prophet shows that these hopes are vain. They thought that God could not fail towards the king without reversing the promises which He had made to the house of David. The prophet announces that Zedekiah will meet with the due reward of his deeds; and yet, in a wonderful manner, God will fulfil His ancient promise to the chosen people, though to human observation all seems to be lost. The kingdom of David will assuredly be exalted in the latter days.

The Parable, Representing the Emptiness of all the Nation's Earthly Hopes of the Future (vers. 1–10).

Vers. 1, 2. "Put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel." "The parable mâshâl, corresponding exactly to the N.T. παραβολή is called *chîdhâh*, a riddle, because of the deeper meaning lying beneath the parabolic shell.—(*Keil.*) As far as it described the future of the house of Israel, it was teaching by analogy, and may, therefore, be regarded in the light of a parable. In its immediate bearing upon the fate of Zedekiah, it may be regarded as a riddle.

Ver. 3. "A great eagle with great wings." "The symbolism of this parable has been traced by some to Babylonian influences working upon the prophet's mind, but without any tenable ground. The figure of the eagle, or bird of prey, applied to a conqueror making a rapid descent upon a country, has as little in it of a specifically Babylonian character as the comparison of the royal family to a cedar or vine. Not only is Nebuchadnezzar compared to an eagle in Jer. xlviii 40; xlix 22, as Cyrus is to a bird of prey in Isa. xlvi. 11; but even Moses has described the paternal watchfulness of God over His own people as bearing them upon eagle's wings (Ex. xix. 4; Deut. xxxii 11). The cedar of Lebanon and the vine are genuine Israelitish figures. The great eagle is the King Nebuchadnezzar (compare ver. 12)"—(*Keil.*) The "great wings" are a symbol of

the vastness of Nebuchadnezzar's dominion. "Long-winged, full of feathers, which had divers colours." The long pinions signify his large and well-disciplined armies; the abundant "feathers" the numerous populations over which he reigned, and the "divers colours" the variety of races, languages, etc., which were found in his empire. "Come unto Lebanon." This is not a symbol of the Israelitish land, but of Jerusalem, with its royal palace so rich in cedar wood. This was the place where the cedar was planted (ver. 12). "And took the highest branch of the cedar." The cedar is the Davidic family, and the "highest branch" of it is King Jehoiachin (2 Kings xxiv. 12).

Ver. 4. "The top of his young twigs." "The youngest and most tender member of that family. Jehoiachin, to whom reference is here symbolically made, was only eighteen years of age when he assumed the reins of government" (2 Kings xxiv. 8).—*(Henderson.)* "Carried it into a land of traffick; he set it in a city of merchants." "Not only was the country of Babylon famous for its transport traffic by means of the Euphrates, but the city itself was famous for its manufacturing and mercantile establishments. From the connection of Babylon with the Persian Gulf, the commerce carried on between that city and India must have been immense."—(*Henderson.*) "That which is intended is rather the Chaldean diplomacy, the policy of the interests that were thus pursued, just as we speak of political negotiations and international intrigues. From this policy originated the removal of Jehoiachin to Babylon. Self-interest is the point of comparison between politics and trade. This community of principle also explains how both politics and trade are represented in Scripture under the figure of adultery, the self-seeking, that conceals itself under the appearance of love (Rev. xiv. 8; xvii. 2); the self-seeking policy (Nah. iii. 4); the trade (Isa. xxiii. 15, etc.). It was, as it were, a profitable stroke of business, that Jehoiachin, who was favourable to Egypt, should be removed to Babylon, and a creature of the King of Babylon set up in his stead, whose fidelity he might count upon, because he had the legitimate sovereign in his custody, and could make use of him according to circumstances.—*(Hengstenberg.)*

Ver. 5. "The seed of the land. This expression signifies what we mean by "a son of the soil," as distinguished from a foreigner. The Chaldeans appointed Zedekiah, who was of the old native royal family (2 Kings xxiv. 17). "He placed it by great waters." Heb. "Many waters." The idea is that of a fertile situation. Though, politically, Zedekiah was in a dependent position, yet he had abundant opportunity for exercising his gifts and power as a ruler. "Set it as a willow tree." This tree is low, and grows near streams (Isa. xliv. 4). "This means, that he treated it as a willow tree, inasmuch as he took it to many waters, set it in a well-watered soil, *i.e.* in a suitable place."—(*Keil*).

Ver. 6. "A spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned towards him, and the roots thereof were under him." "This figure of the vine is not here in contradiction with that of the willow. The two figures present different aspects. The new king is a vine, not a cedar, as the earlier independent family of David. 'Spreading,' so that it grew luxuriantly indeed, but in breadth, not in height, which is still more definitely shown by the addition 'of low stature.' Its (Zedekiah's) roots should be under him—should not be withdrawn from dependence on the king of Babylon."—(*Hengstenberg*). "The subjection of Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar is significantly expressed by his being turned towards him; while he continued faithful as his vassal, though he never rose to any elevation, yet the affairs of the kingdom went on peaceably, and the subjects increased rather than diminished."—(*Henderson*)

Ver. 7. "Another great eagle with great wings and many feathers." This second eagle lacks the long pinions and divers colours of the first. It represents the King of Egypt, who, though he ruled over a widely-spread and powerful kingdom, was yet inferior to the King of Babylon in imperial grandeur and disciplined armies. "This vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation." This vine had water enough already, so that there was no occasion for her to stretch out her branches towards the other eagle. Hereby the conduct of Zedekiah is condemned, who, wearied with subjection to the King of Babylon, applied to the King of Egypt for help, hoping that by this means he might establish the independence of his throne.

Ver. 8. "It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine." "If Zedekiah had remained quiet under Nebuchadnezzar, as a hanging vine, his government might have continued and prospered." —*(Keil.)*

Ver. 9. "Thus saith the Lord God, shall it prosper?" "The subject is the King of Babylon. The roots signify the national existence, the fruit the produce of the land, or the collective gain. The vine becomes dry in all its sprouting leaves. These signify all that by which a prosperous national life is displayed. 'Not by a great arm or many people will it be taken away with its roots.' According to Jer. xxxiv., Nebuchadnezzar led a numerous army to Jerusalem, but there was no need of so great preparations. If a nation have God for its enemy, one can chase a thousand of them, and two can put ten thousand to flight (Deut. xxxii 30). The Egyptians were quite passive (comp. ver. 17). The taking away with the roots signified the total abolition of the national existence."—(*Hengstenberg.*)

Ver. 10. "Shall it not utterly wither when the east wind toucheth it?" "The *east* wind proving noxious to vegetation in Palestine, is here fitly employed as a symbol of the Chaldean army, which came from that quarter. It was only necessary to bring that army into contact with the Jewish state in order to effect its ruin."—(*Henderson.*) The *east* wind is the searching wind of God's anger (Jonah iv. 8)

HOMILETICS.

Teaching by Parables.

1. The form of the discourse here, just as in the case of our Lord, who has developed the parable into one of His ordinary modes of teaching, is to be explained chiefly from the object in view,—partly as it was designed for a circle of hearers, or rather of readers, which, although mixed up in all sorts of ways with higher interests, is yet to be thought of as living mainly in the world of sense, and especially as bound fast in the misery of the exile, and sympathising in the false and faithless policy prevailing at the time in Jerusalem; partly as it might recommend itself to the prophet in the political circumstances by which he was surrounded. The *mashal* before us in Ezekiel goes, therefore, far beyond mere popular illustration. Still less is it to be explained away from the æsthetic stand point, as merely another rhetorical garb for the thought. 2. As in the parable the emblematic form preponderates over the thought, so also here. What the prophet is to say to Israel is said by the whole of that mighty array of figurative expression, for which the animal and vegetable worlds furnish the figures. But the eagle does what eagles otherwise never do; and what is planted

as a willow grows into a vine; and the vine "is represented as falling in love with the other eagle."—(*J. D. Mich.*) The contradictory character of such a representation, and the fact that in the difficulties to be solved (vers. 9, 10 etc.) the comparison comes to a stand, and the closing Messianic portion in which the whole culminates, convert the parable into a "riddle." A trace of irony and the moral tendency, such as belong to the fable, are not wanting.—(*Lange.*)

The Interpretation of the Parable (vers. 11–21).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—From vers. 12–17 we have the formal interpretation of the parable. In vers. 19–21, the threat contained in the parable is confirmed and still further expanded.

Ver. 12. "**Behold the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof.**" The account of the carrying away of the king, *i.e.*, Jehoiachin, and his princes into Babylon is related in 2 Kings xxiv. 11, etc.; Jer. xxiv. 1, and xxix. 2.

Ver. 13. "**And hath taken of the king's seed, and made a covenant with Him, and hath taken an oath of Him.**" "The king's seed is Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah, whom Nebuchadnezzar made king under the name of Zedekiah (2 Kings xxiv. 17), and from whom he took an oath of fealty" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13).—(*Keil.*)

Ver. 14. "**That the kingdom might be base, that might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand.**" The design of Nebuchadnezzar was to weaken the kingdom so that it could not revolt against his authority, but, at the same time, to protect them if they continued loyal.

Ver. 15. "**But he rebelled against Him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people.**" "Though we have no account of this mission to the King of Egypt anywhere else in the Jewish records we may rest satisfied with the testimony of Ezekiel, who was a contemporary. Egypt was celebrated in ancient times for its herd of horses. According to Diod. Sic. i. 45, the whole region from Thebes to Memphis was filled with royal stalls, and such was the abundance of horses, that no fewer than twenty thousand chariots, each having two, could be furnished in time of war. It was, therefore, natural for Zedekiah to turn to that quarter for aid, and considering the hostile attitude of the two great empires, he might reasonably expect that his application would not be made in vain."—(*Henderson.*) "**Shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?**" "Such things,"—perjury—breach of covenant. Even Pagan nations had great reverence for an oath, and looked upon these as among the highest crimes. When one enquired of the Delphic oracle whether he might break his oath, he was told that for putting so impious a question he should be punished by the untimely death of his children.

Ver. 17. "**Make for him in the war.**" Heb., "Act with him in war," *i.e.*, be of service to him. "Pharaoh will not render him the expected powerful aid against the Chaldeans; he will leave his protegé in the lurch when he is hard pressed by his enemies. That the Chaldeans need no great military force against Jerusalem, is manifest here from this, that the Egyptians, against whom alone it could be necessary, come not to its aid with any force. Egypt was already at that time worm-eaten, which the Spirit of God showed to his prophets, while the world went no further than the surface."—(*Hengstenberg.*)

Ver. 18. "**He had given his hand.**"

"To give the hand," is still in the East a pledge of agreement, or fidelity (2 Kings x. 15; Ezra x. 19; Jer. i. 15). Zedekiah proved faithless to God, because in pledging his fealty to the King of Babylon he made a solemn appeal to the God of the Jews (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13). The oath which Zedekiah swore to the King of Babylon is designated in ver. 19 as Jehovah's oath, and the covenant made with him as Jehovah's covenant.

Ver. 20. "And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon." "My net" (ch. xii. 13). Nebuchadnezzar was God's instrument to punish this rebellious king. "And will plead with him there for his trespass." To "plead" with him signifies to bring him to submission, to work conviction in him by means of suffering (ch. xx. 36). This prophecy was fulfilled five years afterwards, when Zedekiah was carried away captive to Babylon, where he died in prison (Jer. lii. 8–11).

Ver. 21. "And all his fugitives with all his bands shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered to all winds." Instead of fugitives the Chaldee reads, "chosen ones," "his brave men," or "heroes." But the ordinary reading yields a suitable sense, and is the one adopted by the LXX. and the Vulgate. "The mention of some who remain, and who are to be scattered towards all the winds, is not at variance with the statement that all the fugitives in the wings of the army are to fall by the sword. The latter threat simply declares that no one will escape death by flight. But there is no necessity to take those who remain as being simply fighting men; and the word "all" must not be taken too literally."—(*Keil*).

HOMILETICS.

(Vers. 17–21.)

1. *Men look for help from an arm of flesh when in straits.* Zedekiah expected that Pharoah's mighty army, and great company, his chariots and horses, should make for him. We are prone to look unto second causes and creature help more than God's. Asa, being in distress, did so, "he relied," saith the text, "on the king of Syria, and not on the Lord his God," (2 Chron. xvi. 7); and "in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians" (ver. 12). Confidence in man is a common practice of the sons of men. Ephraim, when he saw his sickness, went to the Assyrian and sent to Jareb (Hos. v. 13). Men's spirits look any way, turn any whither, for relief, rather than to God. The arm of flesh is more to them than the arm of God. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses;" Some in riches (Psa. lii. 7); some in falsehood (Jer. xxiii. 25); some in strongholds (Zech. ix. 3); some in men (Isa. ii. 22). But it argues atheism, ignorance, pride, unbelief, that men look not unto God at such times; yea, it proclaims the baseness of our spirits, that we fall upon what is visible, weak, unfaithful, at a distance, and neglect God, who is strong, all-sufficient, near; and all because invisible, not seen of us. 2. *Divine Providence overrules and orders things so, that wicked men are frustrated and dissappointed of their hopes and expectations.* Zedekiah hoped and expected that Pharaoh with his great forces, should make much for him; but "neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company make for him." It is not kings, armies, counsellors, and counsels, will do it. Pharaoh's army came forth of Egypt, raised the seige when Nebuchadnezzar was before Jerusalem (Jer. xxxvii. 11); yet it did not make for him. The Chaldeans returned again, sat down before the city, took it, Zedekiah, the princes and others. Absalom

expected much from the counsel and advice of Ahithophel, but God turned it into foolishness (2 Sam xvii. 14); and all the strength he had made not for him (2 Sam. xviii). He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise" (Job. v. 12). Haman could not perform his enterprize. Herod could not accomplish his design to murder Christ when he slew the infants (Matt. ii). Kings and people imagine vain things, and the Lord laughs them to scorn (Psa. ii. 1, 4). He brings "the counsel of the heathen to nought. He maketh the devices of the people," princes, armies, "of none effect," and establisheth His own thoughts and counsels, and that to all generations (Psa. xxxiii. 10, 11). God served His own will upon Pharoah and his army. Zedekiah was frustrated —he looked for light and met with darkness. He leaned upon Pharoah, a broken reed, that ran into his hand and pierced him (2 Kings xviii. 21). God's providence works in all, by all, and overrules all; and He brings to pass His own sacred purposes by kings' armies, by men's wits, wills, policies, and powers. 3. *The Lord takes notice of the circumstances and aggravations of men's sins, especially kings'.* "He despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo! he had given his hand" (ver. 18). I saw him, saith God, reach out his hand, give it as a pawn and pledge of his fidelity to Nebuchadnezzar; he engaged himself thereby to be subject and tributary to him. This aggravated his sin much. It was against the light of nature, special mercy. It was against his superior, Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest king then on earth. It was against the good of the whole Jewish state, for it brought war, famine, plague, captivity upon them all: yea, more than all these, it was a high offence against God and His attributes, and therefore the Lord saith, "he trespassed against me." God minds with what circumstances men's sins are clothed. Solomon's sin had the aggravation nailed to it, "His heart was turned from the Lord God, which had appeared unto him twice" (1 Kings xi. 9). 4. *Oaths and covenants made with men are divine things, and not to be slighted.* "Mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken" (ver. 19). It was made with a heathen king, an idolator, yet God owns it as made with Himself, because His sacred and dreadful name was used therein, and judges the breach and violation thereof as bad as if it had been formally made with Himself. Oaths made between man and man are called in Scripture the "oaths of God" (Eccles. viii. 2); and the covenant made between Jonathan and David is called "the Lord's oath" (2 Sam. xxi, 7). Let not man, therefore, slight covenants and oaths they have made with men, but remember they have to do with God, who is faithful, performing what He swears, and keeping covenant for ever. 5. *The Lord hath nets and snares to catch and take perfidious princes and people in.* "I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare" (ver. 20). There is no evasion when God seeks after sinners. If He throw the net, it shall encompass the greatest leviathan; if He set the snare, it shall take the stoutest lion. God had a net for Pharaoh, and caught that great leviathan in the sea. An oak was the net He caught Absalom in (2 Sam. xviii. 9). The earth was his net to take Korah, Datham, and Abiram. A heap of stones was His net thrown upon Achan. A cave was the snare He took five kings in (Josh. x. 16–18). The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were snared in slime pits (Gen. xiv. 10). Herod could not escape the worms, they were God's net and snare to catch him. The Babylonish armies were His nets and snares to take Hoshea (2 Kings xvii); Manasseh (2 Chron. xxxiii); Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, who were all kings (2 Chron. xxxv). Zedekiah had thoughts he should escape, but he did not escape besieging, taking, carrying into Babylon. When the city was taken, he fled by night (Jer. xxxix. 4); but God spread His net so, that it fell upon him and all with him. Let men take heed of offending the great God of Heaven and earth, for He hath nets and snares to take them

with. If once He throws His net and set His snare, He will take them; and being taken, you may struggle, but shall never get out. Nets and snares are hidden things, they catch suddenly, and hold certainly.—(*Greenhill.*) Ver. 17. The help of man is of no avail when God means to destroy. God's help, on the other hand, avails even against man's help. Zedekiah with Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar with Jehovah. Look at the co-partneries for thyself, and bestow thy confidence accordingly. The latter firm is the more reliable. Cursed is the man that trusteth in man (Jer. xvii.). Men promise, and break their promise; God promises, and does not break His. (Ver. 19). God's oath as against Zedekiah's perjury. God does not swear, and then fail to keep His oath: that shall be learned by experience by those who swear falsely, or who do not keep their oath. If thou appealest to God as a witness, thou summonest Him also as a judge, as an avenger! We have never to do with men alone. (Ver. 20, etc.). No one can escape God. The enemies' sword is sharp; God's sword is sharper still. God's judgments are always meant to lead to the knowledge of Himself as well, and not merely of ourselves.—(*Lange*).

The Restoration of David's House (vers. 22–24).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The dire judgments of God which had been foretold will do their awful work. But beyond them, the prophet sees God's merciful purpose to restore the fallen House of David, in the person of His Messiah. The true twig of the stem of David will spring up and flourish, under whose shadow the whole family of man may dwell in safety.

Ver. 22. "**I also will take of the highest branch of the highest cedar, and will set it.**" The cedar, as before, is the House of David. That sprout of the House of David, Zedekiah, on account of his rebellion, would lose his sovereignty and bring destruction upon the kingdom of Judah, but God's kingdom would still be secure. He would fulfil the promise which He had made to the seed of David. "**I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent.**" "As the highest branch was the furthest from the roots, the reference is to the remote descendants of the royal family, and the *tender one* beautifully symbolizes the Messiah as the *shoot* and the sprout, predicted (Isa. xi. 1). The "high and eminent mountain" was Zion (Psa. ii. 6). It is here described as the mountain of the height of Israel, as at chap. xx. 40, in reference to Jerusalem, which at the time of the Messiah's advent was to be what it had been, the centre of all the tribes, who, restored to their land, would go up again to the festivals, as they had done before the revolt. It derived its chief glory, however, from its being destined to become the spot where the spiritual kingdom was to be established, and whence it was to extend its blessings throughout the whole world."—(*Henderson*).

Ver. 23. "**In the mountain of the height of Israel.**" This was Mount Zion regarded as to its spiritual significance. In actual height, it was far behind Lebanon; but it was a symbol of the kingdom of God, the centre from which salvation should go forth (Psa. xlviii. 3; lxviii. 17). This prophecy reaches it complete fulfilment in the times of the Messiah (Isa. ii. 2). The kingdom of God is to be raised to a supremacy above all the kingdoms of the world. "**And be a goodly cedar; and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell.**" "The Messiah grows into a cedar in the kingdom founded by Him, in which all the inhabitants of the earth will find both food (from the fruits of the tree) and protection (under its shadow). For this figure,

compare Dan. iv. 8, 9. Birds of every kind of plumage is derived from Gen. vii. 14, where birds of every kind find shelter in Noah's ark. The allusion is to men from every kind of people and tribe."—(*Keil.*)

Ver. 24. "**I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree.**" "By this all the trees of the field learn that God lowers the lofty and lifts up the lowly. As the cedar represents the royal house of David, the trees of the field can only be the other kings or royal families of the earth, not the nations outside the limits of the covenant. At the same time, the nations are not to be entirely excluded because the figure of the cedars embraces the idea of the kingdom, so that the trees of the field denote the kingdoms of the earth together with their kings."—(*Keil.*) "**And have made the dry tree to flourish.**" The stem of Judah was dry as regards spiritual promise. The genealogy of the Messiah is traced through such names as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. "How despicable soever the kingdom of Christ may appear to a worldly mind, and however small it was at its commencement, it is truly prolific; and while all the glory of earthly kingdoms fades and perishes, it affords refuge and nourishment to man of every colour and every clime."—(*Henderson.*)

HOMILETICS.

The Glory of Messiah's Kingdom.

I. It is to be erected upon the ruin of the world's hopes. The prophet had hitherto spoken only of judgments which were to fall upon nations for their sins, and chiefly against Israel for her sin against greater light and privilege. David's crown is cast to the ground, the kingdom of Judah is undone, all human hope gone. But the prophet now has a brighter vision. He sees the storm-cloud of judgment pass away, and the rainbow of mercy shows itself. From the ruins of the kingdom the family of David is to be revived in the person of the Messiah. It was necessary that there should be a long time of chastisement, affliction, and sorrow, in order to prepare the chosen nation for the purpose of God. And the same preparation for the coming of Messiah's kingdom was equally necessary for the rest of mankind. Christ was to come in "the fulness of time," when events were ripe for His coming. It was necessary that the world should have sufficient time to make experiments in order to discover whether men could find all help in themselves. The world's pride and confidence had to be broken, so that, in the end, it might humble itself under the Cross of Christ, and therein behold the power and the wisdom of God. *Two great experiments had to be carried out.* The *Jew* had to find out whether righteousness could come by the law, whether the law could give life, sanctify, and save; or, whether there was not some intractable perversity in man's nature which would baffle all such attempts. The same kind of process had to be carried on in the Jewish nation, which was accomplished in the life of the individual when Saul, the persecutor, was transformed into Paul, the Apostle. He had tried all that the law could do for him, and from his failure, from the wreck of all his hopes he passed into the kingdom of the grace of God. The *Gentile* had to make his experiment in order to discover, whether man could unfold his own blessedness out of himself; whether art, or philosophy, or political institutions could completely satisfy all the yearnings of his spiritual nature. The heathen world had time enough, and opportunity allowed for this experiment. God had raised up among them men of great parts, and gifts; and strength of will who could attempt this problem, and solve it, had they been able. If the world could have been redeemed by such means, these men could

have accomplished its redemption. But all had failed. The histories of the great nations of old furnish a sad illustration of the truth, that "the paths of glory lead but to the grave"—the grave of political, intellectual, moral conquests and hopes. The prodigal child, far away from his true home, had come to the husks. The soul of man was still hungry. All had failed to satisfy. This was that emptiness of which Christ's kingdom of grace was the answering fulness. Out of the wrecks and fragments of the old world was to be built up the new.

II. It is to be an omnipotent kingdom. "Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it." I, who am mightier than the royal eagle of Babylon; I, who bore Israel from Egypt as upon eagle's wings. I will lay hold of the seed of David, and raise up my Messiah from thence and establish His kingdom. That kingdom should, indeed, advance from weak beginnings, "I will crop off from the top of his young twigs, a tender one." But the tree was the planting of the Lord, His omnipotence would uphold it, and it must stand for ever. Christ is to "fill all things." And His Church is to be "the fulness of Him who filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 23).

III. Its rule is to be marked by tenderness. "The high cedar." "A tender one." The glory of Lebanon is to be added to the lowly but fruitful vine. Majesty wedded to meekness; a kingdom of immortal strength, but founded upon patience (Rev. i. 9). Its victories were to be the victories of the Lamb. The omnipotence and the love of God were to join hands in the religion of mercy which was to be founded upon Calvary (Matt. xii. 19–21).

IV. It is to be a wide kingdom. A large fellowship. Under the shadow of this goodly cedar shall dwell all fowl of every wing. None are to be left out. It is written of Zion's King that "He shall be favourable to the simple and needy, and preserve the souls of the poor." His kingdom shall embrace heaven and earth, reconciling all things. Christianity alone has the proper qualities of an universal religion.

V. It is to be an eternal kingdom. Being planted by God Himself, this kingdom could have in it no seeds of decay. It can never be moved, but must stand as long as the sun and moon endure, and of the increase of it there shall be no end.

VI. It is to bring abasement to all human pride. "And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish." Such has ever been the process and the end of the Lord in His dealings with men (1 Sam. ii. 7, 8). The rich tree, boasting and promising so much, is withered (Psa. xxxvii. 35, 36). The sapless stem shall be revived (Is. lxi. 3). It was one of the praises by which the world's salvation was greeted. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and hath exalted the humble and meek." The conquests of David, and the magnificence of Solomon ended in the humiliation and shame of Zedekiah's reign. But that royal family was raised up again in Christ; and from it sprang Messiah, the King, whose kingdom was destined to put an end to all those of the world which were founded upon force, error, and fraud. The kingdom founded upon love would exalt the good and the true, though in lowly condition; and debase the proud, though surrounded by all the glory which the world could give.

The Tree Christ, which God has prepared for us.

1. *As to its nature.* 2. *As to its destiny.* Summer and winter the cedar is green, and never loses its leaves or its verdure. The everlastingly green Tree

of Life is Christ. No wood is more durable; so Christ is the indestructible foundation for our hopes, etc. We are the branches in the cedar of God. Our fruits are Christ's, who produces them in us and by us. John and Peter, Paul and James, what boughs in that Cedar! and the fathers and the Reformers, and all believers since. What a Tree! What a green, flourishing, fruit-laden array of branches that which sways around it! What a mighty, densely-foliaged, far-shadowing-crown! and in the crown what gales, and zephyrs, and rustlings of holy life and divine love! Here there is promised to Christ and His cause nothing less than final triumph over the whole world—the pompous glory of Babylon, Egypt, Rome, and Athens, where is it to be found?—*(Krummacher.)*

1. *After grievous judgments threatened, God comforts His people.* When God should root out Zedekiah and his people the kingdom would be laid waste; the faithful should suffer much, lose estates, friends, liberty, country, temple, ordinances, and worship of God. Now for comfort against all these evils, he tells them of the Messiah. The stem of Jesse seemed to be cut down, and the root of Jesse to be pulled up; but the Lord preserved the root and stem, out of which he brought a rod and a branch for the comfort of the faithful, suffering Jews. This promise of the Branch is often mentioned for the purpose of comfort (Jer. xxiii. 5, 6; xxxiii. 15, 16; Zech. iii. 8; vi. 12, 13).

2. *The Lord Christ descended from the highest.* "I will take of the highest branch," etc. He came from the loins of Jeconiah, who was King of Judah, and from fourteen kings before him (Matt. i.). He was the son of nobles, and born a king (Matt. ii. 12). He was the first-born of the kings of Judah, the right heir to the kingdom which Herod at that time usurped.

3. *The beginnings of Christ were mean and low.* "I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one." Christ, at first, was as a little tender shoot of a tree set in the earth; and how weak, mean, low, and inconsiderable is such a thing. Such were the beginnings of Christ. He took flesh of a poor virgin, the wife of a carpenter. He was born in a poor village (Mic. v. 2); in a stable, laid in a manger (Luke ii. 7). He was subject to his parents (Luke ii. 51). He lay in the dark till thirty years of age (Luke iii. 23); and then He began with two or three poor fishermen (Matt. iii. 18-22); then some others to the number of twelve; and even now, when He seemed to be somebody, He had not a house or bed for Himself or for them (Luke ix. 58). And for His maintenance, it was at the good will of others (Luke viii. 3).

4. *The Lord Christ is planted in the Church, and becomes a fruitful and goodly cedar therein.* "I will plant it upon a high mountain," etc. Christ was planted in Zion, there He grew, there He brought forth fruit. With the timber of this cedar was the Church built, with the fruit of this cedar it is maintained (Isa. iv. 2). The branch was Christ, and He should be for beauty and glory to the Church, and the fruit that should come from Him should be excellent. The Church saith, "His fruit was sweet to my taste." Wisdom, righteousness, redemption, and sanctification are the fruits of this cedar (1 Cor. i. 30); the life of the world (John vi. 33); the ordinances of the Gospel (Matt. xxviii. 19; 1 Cor. i. 23); "exceeding great and precious promises;" reconciliation (Col. i. 20); the gift of the comforter (John xvi. 7); revelation of the counsels of God (John xv. 15); fellowship with the Father and the Son (John xiv. 9; 1 John i. 3); "eternal life" (John x. 28). Such was the fruit this cedar bore. In the midst of the Church He was planted, fruitful, and sang praise to God (Heb ii. 12). And so high is this cedar grown, that it is now in heaven at the right hand of God (Eph. i. 20, 21). The mountain of the Lord is on the top of all mountains, and this cedar on the top of that mountain.

5. *There is safety under Christ, He will protect His people from all harms.* "Under it shall they dwell." Men will not dwell where there is no safety. Those who come under Christ's shadow. His power and government, shall dwell

there in safety. He will protect His Church, and tread down the enemies thereof, whatever their power, politics, and pretences are. He is a cedar in wisdom (Col. ii. 3); a cedar in power (Matt. xxviii. 18); a cedar in His providence and vigilance (Isa. xxviii. 3); hence saith the Church, "I sat under His shadow with great delight" (Cant. ii. 3). It is Christ secures from sin, from the wisdom of the flesh, the storms of the world, temptations of hell, and whatever is dangerous (Isa. xxv. 4). If you be under the shadow of this cedar, though the winds blow hard, the floods beat sore, and rain fall with strength, yet you shall be as safe as the house built upon the rock (Matt. vii. 24, 25).

6. *Princes that are haughty and proud, God will bring them down though they be in flourishing conditions.* "I have brought down the high tree," etc. Zedekiah was a high tree; the king of Judah, and his spirit was high; he hearkened not to the God of Israel, nor to His prophets; he would not keep covenant and promise with the king of Babylon. But God laid the axe to the root of this tree and hewed it down. No trees are so high, but the Lord who is higher than they, can lay them low. Let them be green with boughs, branches, leaves; let them have many soldiers, many counsellors, many kingdoms, all cannot preserve them from ruin. Nebuchadnezzar was a high tree, his top reached to heaven (Dan. iv. 11); but, "A watcher and a holy one came down from heaven, cried aloud and said, Hew down the tree, cut off his branches," etc. (Dan. iv. 13, 14). There is a watcher who observes the plots and practices of kings, and hews them down at His pleasure. Pharaoh was a high tree, the highest in all Egypt; he said, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them." Here was pride and cruelty, which usually go together; and what followed hereupon? "Thou did'st blow with thy wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters (Ex. xv. 9, 10.) Saul was a goodly man, a high tree in Israel; he was proud, cruel, false, disobedient to God; and He rejected him, and cut him down by the Philistines and his own sword (1 Sam. xxxi). So Ahab (1 Kings xxii); Herod (Acts xii. 23); Belshazzar (Dan. v. 5, 22, 23, 30). The Lord hath days and times to reckon with the high and haughty ones (Isa. x. 33, 34; ii. 12-17).

7. *How low soever the conditions of kingdoms, families, or persons are, God is able to raise them.* "I have exalted the low tree," etc. The kingdom of Judah, the house of David, the person of Jeconiah, were very low in Babylon, like low shrubs, dry trees. But God exalted them, and brought a glorious kingdom and a church out of those low beginnings. Was not Christ like a low and dry tree, when He lay in the loins of Jeconiah, a prisoner, a captive; when He lay in the womb of the Virgin; hewed timber, made houses for His living; especially when He was cut down and laid in the heart of the earth? Was He not a dry tree then? But God exalted Him, set Him at His right hand; and Peter proclaimed it (Acts ii. 33, 36).

8. *God will do all these things so eminently that the world shall take notice, and be filled with the glory thereof.* "And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord," etc. Not only the orchard trees, but the field trees, not domestic alone, but wild ones. Men shall fear and hide themselves, "for the glory of His Majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Isa. ii. 19). —(*Greenhill.*)

The Equity of the Divine Justice (chap. xviii.).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The judgments announced in chaps. viii, xi, were intended to bring Israel to repentance. But this salutary purpose was frustrated by the manner in which these judgments were interpreted. The people

considered themselves as innocent children suffering for the iniquity of their fathers, and that, therefore, repentance was useless. The prophet destroys this refuge by declaring that each man shall have to bear the punishment of his own sin. That punishment can only be averted by repentance (vers. 21-29). Thus the rule of God's judgments was equity.

The Ungodly Proverb, and the Declaration that it shall be no more heard in Israel (Vers. 1–4).

Vers. 1, 2. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The same proverb is quoted in Jer. xxxi 29, 30, where it is also condemned as an error. The meaning of it is sufficiently clear. The sour grapes which the fathers eat are their own personal sins which they commit; the setting of the children's teeth on edge is the suffering consequent upon these sins, and which is visited upon the children.

Ver. 3. "Ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel." *Heb.* "It shall not be to you." The meaning is, that it shall be no longer morally possible for them to use this proverb; for they would be convinced of the justice of God's ways, not only by the reason of the thing itself, but also by the judgments which would be sent upon them. The equity of God's dealings would be vindicated in so clear a manner, that none would be bold enough to call it in question.

Ver. 4. "All souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine." They are His by right of creation. They have come from Him, the Fountain of Life, the Father of Spirits. "God would surrender His property if He permitted souls, whether individuals or whole generations, to suffer punishment for the guilt of others. In the likeness of God, on which the sentence "All souls are Mine" rests, lies the principle that souls cannot be degraded into servile instruments—that each can only be treated according to His works."—(*Hengstenberg*). "In this verse God asserts His universal propriety in His rational creation. *All the souls, i.e.*, persons—the noblest part of the constituent elements of the human subject being put for the whole. He had created them all, and having endowed them with those powers and faculties which are necessary to constitute them subjects of moral government, He had a sovereign and indisputable right to deal with them in equity according to their deserts. In punishing the guilty, He acts without respect of persons. The individual culprit is dealt with on the ground of his own personal deserts."—(*Henderson*). "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "Die, the end of a process,—the separation of the soul from its life-source, the Spirit of God (Deut. xxx. 25; Jer. xxi. 8; Prov. xi. 19). This cannot happen without an act of God's retributive justice, so that the punishment inflicted by God must correspond to man's guilt."—(*Lange*).

HOMILETICS.

(Ver. 2).

Two things are to be considered concerning this proverb—

1. The meaning of it. By "sour grapes," the Jews understand sin, not sin simply, but such sins as bring heavy judgments of God upon a land or people, as idolatry, murder, oppression, drunkenness, profaneness, etc. The prophet

Isaiah warrants this sense of sour grapes, when he calls the sins of Judah "wild grapes" (Isa. v. 24). God looked that His vineyard should bring forth grapes, good fruit, justice, righteousness, truth; and it brought forth wild grapes, oppression, a cry, covetousness, lasciviousness, drunkenness, pride. Such sins are called sour or wild grapes, because they wound conscience, are burdensome unto others, are as distasteful unto God as such grapes are to us. They provoke Him to lay waste the vine that bears such fruit. By this proverb thus much is signified, that the fathers had sinned, and the children suffered for their sin; the fathers did that which was very offensive unto God, and the children were punished for it; they did eat the sour grapes, brought forth the bitter fruit, and these smarted for it; the children's teeth were set on edge, they were punished for what their fathers had done. They thought and said that their fathers were the cause of all the evils which befell them. Like unto this proverb are these: "Kings sin, and the people suffer." "The child offends, and the servant is beaten."

II. The occasion. The princes and people going on in the wicked ways of their fathers, the prophets did threaten them with destruction of their temple, city and estate. Thereupon they said, "Our fathers did as we do, and they were spared; why should we suffer"? And when the prophets pressed the sins of Manasseh, as Jer. xv. 3, 4, "I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the Lord; the sword to slay, the dogs to tear, the fowls of heaven, the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy: and I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem." When God stirred the prophets to tell them that for the sins of this king he would lay Jerusalem waste, as he had the ten tribes for Jeroboam's sins, they then took up this proverb, and said, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the childrens' teeth are set on edge." Ahaz, Manasseh, Amon, and others of our forefathers, have sinned, and we must suffer! Or thus: Zedekiah and his counsellors had perfidiously broken covenant with Nebuchadnezzar, for which the prophets threatened utter ruin to all: hereupon the people said, "Our fathers have eaten sour grapes," etc.; the kings and nobles have transgressed, and we shall be ruined for it! This proverb was grown common amongst them, both in Babylon and in Zion, it was tossed up and down and spread. Ezekiel tells them of it in Babylon, and Jeremiah in Zion (Jer. xxxi. 29). The evil of this proverb was great, for besides their charging God with injustice and impartiality, hereby—(1). They discovered their father's sins and nakedness, and that without sorrow or repentance for them. (2). Made light of anything the prophets threatened against them. (3). Obstructed the way against future repentance, or profiting by the judgments of God which should come upon them. For being persuaded and possessed with this opinion, that they suffered unjustly for their father's sins, not their own, they would never submit, mourn, condemn, but justify themselves.—(*Greenhill*).

The cause of the cessation of this proverb is the severity of the Divine judgments. When these appear, the fig-leaves fall off, the slumbering conscience awakens and cries out. "It is I and my sins!" There is a multitude of theorems and theological dogmas which are possible only in certain times, and slink away abashed when the thunders of Divine judgment begin to roll.—(*Hengstenberg*).

Either a man recognises in judgment—in the self-judgment of a believing repentance—his guilt before God, or God makes the whole world recognise it in us, through the judgment which overtakes us, even when we would deny our guilt. God swears by His life; for where His righteousness is called in question, His life in this world of sin and death is assailed.—(*Lange.*)

(Ver. 4).

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Hence—1. *God may lay what punishment He pleases upon the soul that sins.* "All souls are Mine," and the soul that sinneth shall suffer whatever I see good, according to the nature of its sin. However the words seem to impart an equal punishment for all sins, yet it is otherwise; according to the intrinsical nature, circumstances, and demerit of the sin, shall be the death. God will proportion the one unto the other; as He rewards men according to their works, so He will punish them according to their sins. God hath variety of deaths, and various degrees of those deaths, variety of afflictions, and various degrees of the same; He lays on which and in what measure He pleases. If states think good to inflict upon delinquents several punishments, and in high degree as they find men guilty, how much more may God. He smote Jehoram with incurable and sore diseases (2 Chron. xxi. 18, 19). He sent fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. xix). He did that in Jerusalem which He never did before, nor ever would do the like (Ez. v. 9, 10). Neither these nor any that suffer in what kind soever, do suffer unjustly; men may pretend innocency, but if they suffer, and that severely, God is not cruel, they are not guiltless. 2. *Sin is a deadly thing* "The soul that sinneth shall die. Sin is the great murderer, it let death into the world, and keeps death alive. If there were no sin there would be no death, no punishment, but if men sin they must suffer. The old world sinned and died for it; Sodomites sinned and died for it; the Bethshemites sinned by looking into the ark, and fifty thousand of them died for it: Jerusalem sins and is burnt for it, and her children buried in a Babylonish grave; Ananias and Sapphira die for their dissimulation. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi. 23). Let us then take heed of sin, whereby we offend that God who hath said, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." He is a dreadful Majesty and ought greatly to be feared. "Who would not fear Thee, O King of nations? for to Thee doth it appertain" (Jer. x. 7). Fear is God's due, and your duty; "Stand in awe," then, "and sin not" (Psa. iv. 4). If you sin, you must die; death is the king of fears, and God is the King of death; He can command it to seize upon you in a moment.—*(Greenhill).*

HOMILETICS.

The Individuality of the Soul.

(Ver. 4).

These idolatrous Israelites complained that they were unjustly punished for the sins of their fathers. The innocent suffered instead of the guilty. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." By nature's law the man who eats sour grapes, and he alone, will feel the unpleasant sensation of the acid on his own teeth. They complain that the dealings of Providence, as expounded by the prophet, are contrary to the equity and justice of nature. And this complaint is, to a very large extent, founded upon a truth. Under God's moral government the innocent do suffer for the guilty. All generations of men are subject to the stern law of inheritance, so that the entail of sin and suffering falls to the lot of those who are innocent of the original transgression. But the prophet assures his countrymen that, despite all appearances to the contrary, God's ways are equal. There is no injustice done to any man on account of any complication of his history with

that of another, or with that of the human race. "As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel." And the reason given is this:—"Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Each individual soul comes from God, who is the fountain of life, is accountable ultimately to Him alone, and each man will be treated in sole regard to himself without reference to any other man. He who continues in sin will incur the penalty of death; which will be visited upon him for his own sins, and not for those of his forefathers. This death of the soul is not the loss of existence, but such death as the soul can suffer, *i.e.*, moral and spiritual death, exclusion from God's light and love. Such a man is dead while he liveth. His portion is a living death. This passage speaks to us of the origin, and of the individuality of the human soul.

I. **The origin of the human soul.** "All souls are mine." They are God's *by right of creation*, which is the strongest title of ownership. And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. i. 26). "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. ii. 7). God is the "Father of spirits," and "we are also His offspring." "Man is *from* God as well as *to* God. He is of the blood-royal of heaven. The Bible itself, what is it but a *biography of the soul*?" Its noble and illustrious birth, beautiful childhood, and its terrible fall; its long and painful discipline of sorrow through the ages of history; the grace of God towards it in the gifts of salvation, the provisions for its perfect restoration through a Divine Redeemer, a paradise won for it beyond the grave—these great facts concerning the soul are the main burden of the Bible. To know, as a deep and heart-felt conviction, the origin and worth of the soul is to be a religious man: to live a life founded on that conviction is to be a Christian.

II. **The individuality of the soul.** Each soul of man has a separate existence in eternity as well as in time. When we die we do not become an unconscious portion of the universal life. We are not absorbed into God, like a drop which falls into the ocean. We do not perish by infinite diffusion. Such is the teaching of the Bible. But—1. *It is very difficult for us to realise this truth.* The truth we have to consider is—that each and every one of all who now live, or who have ever lived, is a distinct and independent being. There are certain facts and circumstances of human life which render it difficult for us to realise this truth. Take the case of the commander of a large army. Does such a man realise this truth fully when he sends a large body of men on some dangerous service? Or, does he not rather regard each man as one of the springs or wheels of a vast machine? To the whole collection of separate powers ministering to one end he assigns individuality. The only fact is not present vividly before him, that the real individuality is that of each single soul. And all men are liable, more or less, to make this false estimate. We are prone to class men in masses, and to regard them as we do the stones of a building which derives unity only from its form and from the disposition of all its parts to the general effect. We deal only with great unities; the separate portions do not enter into our thought. We have a tendency to treat abstractions of our own creation as real things. Thus we speak of *national greatness.* And what does this mean? It means that multitudes of men who happen to be living together at one time, and in the same country, are able to act upon each other and upon the world at large in such a way as to gain importance, power, wealth, and eminence. We regard these multitudes as one great body, and when one and another dies we do not consider it as the passage of a soul into the unseen state. Their places are supplied by others: the *individual*

perishes, the *nation* remains. We think of the nation as still the same in its vast and energetic life, but we are apt to forget that it is only the component parts that are the true realities. Consider again, *the multitudes of a great city.* We gain an idea of human energy, of the splendour and magnificence of man's works. But what is the real truth? Why, that each man in that city is his own centre, and all things about him are but mere shades among which he walks, as "in a vain shadow and disquieteth himself in vain." Nothing outside of him can touch his soul or quench his immortality. He must live with himself for ever. He has an unfathomable depth within him, and an infinite abyss of existence. 2. *We should make an effort to realise this truth.* The truth, that all who have ever lived here and have seen the sun successively are alive now, each one in his own person; all those who lived before the Flood and in the ages since, all who have gained a name in the world, or who have died without fame—the good, the bad, the wise, the ignorant; all those whose names we see written in churches or churchyards, great writers whose works we see in our libraries, the workmen who have raised those great buildings and monuments which are the wonder of the world: they are all in God's remembrance, and before His eye—they still live. To see a human being, even by a mere passing glance, is an act which, in its deep significance, is unlike all other occurrences in nature. The rain falls, the wind blows; but showers and storms have no existence beyond the time when they happened. They are gone, and are nothing in themselves. But when we have seen a child of Adam, we have seen the temple of an immortal soul. It lives on; and when here on earth it is seen no more, it is still somewhere awaiting God. 3. *It is as individual souls that we shall return to God.* We must all take that solemn journey which will bring us face to face with God. We cannot pass on one side of Him, or in any way avoid Him, but must go straight into His presence. Each man will feel that he is himself, and not another, and that the eye of God is upon him. When a few more years have come and gone, there will be no need of any effort of mind on our part, in order to realise the individuality of the soul. No need of any effort to realise the nothingness of this vain world when the world has for us vanished away and we are left alone with God. There is one Being to whom alone we are ultimately accountable. Strive to say at last in faith and hope, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." "Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit."

(Vers. 5-9.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — True righteousness is described as the fulfilment of the commandments of God. Through such righteousness the righteous shall live.

Ver. 5. "That which is lawful and right" (Heb.) "Judgment and righteousness." The deeds must conform to the rule of right, and the motive must be the love of right. "The first application of the principle is made to the righteous man. He is described according to *Being* and *Doing*,—essentially and actually; in particular, doing *judgment*, in general, *righteousness*: His doing is then more precisely depicted, not without a tendency to antithesis."—*Lange.*

Ver. 6. "Hath not eaten upon the mountains." Mountains where idol festivals were held (Ezek. vi. 13). Eating that which was offered in sacrifice to an idol was supposed to secure the favour of that deity (1 Cor. x. 20, 21). "Neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel." The "lifting up of the eyes" denotes the expectation of help (Psa. cxxi. 1). "Neither hath come near to a menstruous woman." Conjugal intercourse with a wife while she was set apart for her uncleanness

was forbidden by the law of Israel on pain of death. It was a defilement of the marriage relation. (Lev. xviii. 19, xx. 18). "The prohibition of impurities in the married state is included, which is directed against unbridled lust that bows not to the ordinance of God."—(*Hengstenberg.*)

Ver. 7. "**Restored to the debtor his pledge.**" This restoration was commanded by the law, as the things taken in pledge were considered as necessary to the existence of the poor man (Ex. xxii. 25; Deut. xxiv. 6, 10, etc.). "**His bread to the hungry.**" Not regarding it as *his;* not saying with Nabal, "Shall I take *my* bread . . . . . and give it away?" (1 Sam. xxv. 11).

Ver. 8. "**Given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase.**" The Hebrew word for usury is very expressive. It literally signifies *biting,* and must have originated in the practice of taking exorbitant interest. The law of Moses absolutely prohibited the Jews from taking any interest from their brethren, but permitted them to do so from a foreigner (Ex. xxii. 25; Deut. xxiii. 19, 20). "*Increase*" is another term expressive of interest or usury, denoting riches obtained by lending money at high interest, or by making exorbitant charges on the natural productions of the soil."—(*Henderson*). The taking of "increase" on a loan of the necessaries of life was forbidden to the Israelite (Lev. xxv. 36, 37). "**Hath executed true judgment between man and man.**" In the special capacity of a judge or arbiter.

Ver. 9. "**He is just.**" Really such—righteousness as contra-distinguished from its semblance. "**He shall surely live.**" He shall save his soul—shall live in the fullest, deepest sense of the word. "The man who was blameless with respect to all the points here specified was accounted *righteous* in the eye of the law, and entitled to enjoy the life which the law secured."—(*Henderson.*)

HOMILETICS.

A Picture of Righteousness (vers. 5–9).

The whole of this paragraph is an expansion of the words, "**If a man be just' and do that which is lawful and right**" (ver. 5). Righteousness consists in the fulfilment of the commandments of God's law. It is conformity to a standard which is not arbitrary, but founded upon the nature of God Himself and His relations to mankind. But more particularly, righteousness consists—

I. In the proper discharge of religious duties. Those duties which more nearly concern God and His worship. They are laid down in the first Table of the Law. In this passage, they are described negatively as consisting, in general, in *the avoidance of idolatry.* (1) *In its grosser forms.* Such as, "eating upon the mountains" (ver. 6), *i.e.,* observing the sacrificial festivals of the heathen gods and, therefore, sacrificing to idols (Deut. xii. 2, etc.). This was the chief transgression by outward acts against the law of Divine worship. There can be no true righteousness unless God is worshipped in purity and sincerity. But idolatry is also to be avoided,—(2.) *In its more refined forms.* Some of the prophet's countrymen could not degrade themselves so far as to join in outward acts of idolatrous worship. But the essential spirit of idolatry was in them. They "lifted up their eyes to the idols of the house of Israel" in the expectation of help from them, thus offering supplication to them and making them an object of trust. Israel had done this in times past, and was doing so still (Deut. iv. 19; Ezek. vi. 13). God will have no compromises or accommodations

in the matter of His worship. He regards the direction of the heart, and we cannot escape His condemnation by merely avoiding the grosser forms of sin while we retain the abominable thing itself.

II. In the proper discharge of moral duties. Those which are concerned with the relations of men to one another. The moral law is the foundation of the peace and welfare of society—the bond which holds it together. The following principles underlie the moral duties insisted on here. 1. *The principle of purity.* That purity which consists in the proper control of the lusts of the flesh. "Neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife" (ver. 6). The marriage relation is to be held sacred. Sins against it tend to destroy the very foundations of society, make havoc of the peace of families, and are a fruitful source of many crimes and disorders. Sins of impurity pollute the mind, extinguish the better instincts of the mind and heart, and tend more than any other to drag a man down to the level of the brute. This principle of purity is to be observed within the marriage relation itself, "Neither hath come near to a menstruous woman" (ver. 6). Conjugal intercourse with a wife during menstruation was forbidden by the law as a defilement of the marriage relation (Lev. xviii. 19; xx. 18). Marriage was not to be regarded as giving the right to an unbridled licence of indulgence, but it was to be under the control of wholesome moral laws. 2. *The principle of kindness.* The righteous man is to abstain from all oppression, to spoil none by violence, to withhold the hand from every iniquity done against another (vers. 7, 8). But there must be also active goodness. "Hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment" (ver. 7). kindness is to be shown towards the unhappy and the unfortunate. We may claim the right to do what we like with our own, and the law of our nation may uphold us therein. But there is another law—the law of kindness within our hearts—that bids us spend our treasure for the good of our fellow men. We are just as much bound to do good to others as not to rob them, to reach forth the hand to help them as not to smite them with the fist of wickedness. God uses the righteous man as the means by which He manifests His own loving kindness to those who are in distress. And especially is kindness to be shown towards brethren—those who are of the same commonwealth and religion as ourselves. The Israelites were forbidden to take usury from their brethren on a loan of money, or "increase" on a loan of the necessaries of life (Lev. xxv. 36, 37). They were forbidden to exercise their full rights, even when a brother through poverty had sold himself into slavery. "Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour, but shalt fear thy God" (Lev. xxv. 43). 3. *The principle of mercy.* The proper objects of kindness and pity are the unhappy and unfortunate: but the objects of mercy are the undeserving. Mercy is shown towards those who have no claim upon us. "Hath restored to the debtor his pledge" (ver. 7). The godly man will not stand upon his rights to the real injury of another. The debtor has no claim upon us, and is, therefore, a proper object of our mercy. 4. *The principle of justice.* "Hath executed true judgment between man and man" (ver. 8). In every dispute the righteous man, when appealed to, will give a judgment which is according to truth. "To deal truly," *lit.* "to do truth," *i.e.*, to act with uprightness and sincerity (Psa. li. 6; 1 Cor. v. 8; Eph. iv. 21).

III. In the practical recognition of the truth that all duties have reference to God. The Bible knows nothing of "independent morality." "My statutes," "My judgments" (ver. 9). We are to practise all religious and moral duties because they are pleasing to God; they are according to His will. This doctrine saves religion from being degraded into a mere sentiment. True religion is devotion to a Living Person, obedience to a Living Will. It also saves morality

from being regarded as founded solely upon utilitarianism. We are to love men and do our duty towards them for God's sake.

(Ver. 7).

I. Wherein this oppression consists. 1. *In outreaching men in buying or selling.* Men must neither sell too dear, nor buy too cheap; which is contrary to the practice of the world (Lev. xxv. 14). (1.) *It is oppression when the buyer will wring a commodity out of his neighbour's or brother's hand, which he is unwilling to part withal.* Ahab will have Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings xxii.) (2.) *When he makes advantage of the seller's necessity.* And so many monied men will furnish sellers and needy men with money, upon condition they may have such wares, such a house, such land, at an easier rate. Such advantage they made of them who were necessitated to mortgage their lands, vineyards, and houses for money to buy corn (Neh. v. 3). (3.) *When he disparageth the commodities of the seller* (Prov. xx. 14). 2. *In withholding that which is right and due to others* (St. James v. 4; St. Luke x. 7; Lev. xix. 13; Mal. iii. 5). If any withhold the portion of orphans, legacies given to the poor, the estates and rights of widows, they will lie under the censure of being oppressors. 3. *In laying too heavy burdens and tasks upon others.* The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites (Ex. iii. 7). And many lay more upon their servants than they can well perform. They must be up early, fare hard, work hard, and be worn out before their time. And what is this but oppression in a high degree? Whereas the rule is, "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven" (Col. iv. 1). 4. *In preventing and delaying of justice and judgment.* In this way the petitions and causes of widows, orphans and poor people cannot be heard (Isa. i. 23). The fatherless and widows had no gifts, no bribes to give them; the rich had, and by that means justice was perverted, and judgment delayed (Amos vi. 12). And this sin is reckoned amongst the mighty ones (Amos v. 12). 5. *In imposing upon men's consciences those things which are doubtful and disputable.* When doctrines, worship, disciplines are imposed upon men's consciences, which cannot clearly be made out to them, it is the height of oppression, and the ground-work of persecution. The Scribes and Pharisees taught for doctrines the commandments of men (St. Matt. xv. 9); they laid grievous burdens upon men's shoulders and hearts (St. Matt. xxiii. 4). Whatever is done with doubting is of sin (Rom. xiv. 23).

II. The evil of oppressing. 1. *It is an unnatural evil.* No creatures do oppress those of their own kind. But men most unnaturally prey upon one another; one man is a wolf to another (Ezek. xxii. 27). Lions have spared men (Dan. vi.); ravens fed men (1 Kings xvii.); and yet one man seeks to eat up and devour another. 2. *There is little fear of God in the hearts of those who oppress others.* "Ye shall not oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God" (Lev. xxv. 17). It is here intimated that, if they oppress, they do not fear God; if they fear God, they will not oppress; for "by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil" (Prov. xvi. 6). The Jews oppressing one another is attributed to their not fearing God (Neh. v. 9). 3. *It is against that great and common rule of equity* (St. Matt. vii. 12). St. Jerome calls this sentence of Christ "the summary of justice." 4. *It is a sin which greatly provokes God.* Dreadful woes are denounced against it, and dreadful judgments upon those who are guilty of it (Micah ii. 12; Hab. ii. 12; Zeph. iii. 1; Jer. xxii. 13; Isa. x. 1-3; Ex. xxii. 21-24). "But hath restored to the debtor his pledge," etc. The Lord gave them

laws concerning this (Ex. xxii. 26). They might not take the upper millstone, nor a widow's garment, for pledges; and what they did take they were faithfully and speedily to return. Job complains of the wicked that they took the widow's ox for a pledge, and the garments of the poor (Job. xxiv. 3, 9). "Hath spoiled none by violence." Wicked men are said to "drink the wine of violence." "They sleep not except they cause some to fall" (Prov. iv. 16, 17). "He hath given his bread to the hungry, hath covered the naked with a garment." This is *the exercise of faith* (Eccles. xi. 1). It *makes a man to be of good report* (Psa. cxii. 9). It is *the special distinction of a good man* (Psa. cxii. 1, 9). It is *feeding of Christ* (St. Matt. xxv. 35, 40). It is *an honour to religion* (St. James i. 27). It *procures many a prayer and blessing* (2 Cor. ix. 10; Job xxix. 13; 2 Tim. i. 16). It *makes like unto God* (St. Luke vi. 36). It is *lending to the Lord* (Prov. xix. 17). It is *pleasing and acceptable to God* (Acts x.; Heb. xiii. 16).—*Greenhill.*

(Vers. 10–20).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Two cases are here supposed: (1). That of a righteous father who begets an unrighteous son. (2). That of a righteous son who refuses to copy the evil example of his father. And the prophet affirms that, in the former case, the righteousness of the father will not avail to save the son; and in the latter, that the son shall not suffer for the unrighteousness of his father. One shall not die for the iniquity of the other. Each man shall save his own soul by his righteousness.

Vers. 10-13. "We have here the case of an impious son, who, instead of following the good example of his pious parent, adopts a course directly the reverse, and unscrupulously indulges in crimes condemned by the law. Upon him an unmitigated sentence is pronounced. In the language of the Orientals, the blood which a murderer has shed is said to be upon him, till it be avenged by his punishment."—(*Henderson*).

Vers. 14-18. "This case is likewise that of a son, not, like the former, of a righteous man, but of the unrighteous person whose character has just been depicted. This son is supposed to be shocked at the sight of his father's depravity, and to be influenced, by a due regard to the consequences, to avoid the sins which his parent had committed. It is expressly declared that he should not be punished for the crimes of his father, but that the father only, being the guilty party, should suffer."—(*Henderson*).

Ver. 17. "*Hath taken off His hand from the poor.*" This is to be understood in a good sense—to turn back the hand, *i.e.*, from oppressing the poor. He withdraws the hand that was tempted to exact the full legal claim.

THE LAW OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS AND OF THE RIGHTEOUS SON (vers. 10-20).

The two cases here supposed show that—

I. The best examples of righteousness may fail of their proper effects. The righteous father may have an unrighteous son. The life of such a father must have a native power and influence for good. He would study to bring up his son in the way of righteousness. Yet his example and instruction may altogether fail. The religious histories of the families of good men afford many a sad illustration of the truth that grace does not run in the blood. The power of evil may be stronger than the best influences on the side of good.

II. An evil example may be effectual as a warning. Where a good example fails, an evil example may succeed in turning another to righteousness. But for this salutary effect it is necessary—1. *That the real evil of the example may be recognised.* "A son that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done" (ver. 14) sees them in their vile nature, in their evil consequences, and as sins against God. Then such evil examples become like a beacon to the voyager. They act as a warning. The evil of sin must be seen as such in order to be dreaded and avoided. It is also necessary—2. *That the sight of evil examples should produce serious thought.* "And considereth and doeth not such like" (ver. 14) In most cases, evil examples act like a contagion. But if we seriously consider, they reveal to us the sad effects of sin, and we turn our feet to God's testimonies. We learn not to do such like things. Thus the sin of another may instruct us in righteousness.

III. That righteousness is a matter of personal responsibility. The righteous son shall not be punished for the unrighteousness of his father, nor the righteous father for the unrighteousness of his son (ver. 20). Righteousness is not like property, family name or title, the secure and necessary heritage of children. It is a matter between the individual soul and God. *The exceptions to this law of God's righteous dealing are only apparent.* Godly men share in the general calamities sent upon nations, children suffer many evils from the iniquity of their fathers; but none of these are on that account deprived of God's favour. These judgments in the case of the righteous act as a discipline of piety. Such afflictions are turned into blessings.

(Ver. 14).

I. The nature of consideration. 1. *It is an exercise of the understanding, mind, and heart.* These are at work in consideration (Psa. cxix. 59). This is called communing with a man's own heart (Psa. lxxvii. 6). 2. *Serious.* It is not a slight general thinking of a thing, but a serious, settled minding of a thing; it notes the sinking down of a thing into our minds. "I considered in my heart" (Eccl. ix. 1); Hebrew is, I set it to my heart. Consideration is as setting the heart to a thing, or upon a thing, as a bee sets upon a flower, and sets her strength to it to draw out the sweet in it. 3. *It is about things to be done, or not to be done.* Contemplation looks upon things as the eye upon the object. Judgment discerns the things whether good or bad, right or wrong, and there leaves them, having pronounced them so. Meditation is a further inquisition into truth, and comes up nearest to consideration which is in order to doing or not doing. Men intend this and that, and oft fall upon things rashly to their prejudice, because they consider not; now consideration reflects upon things intended. The two sons in the Gospel, one said, I will go, and went not; the other said, I will not go, and went. The one's purpose was to go, the other's not to go; but this last, considering of his sinful purpose, intention, and resolution, repented, and went (St. Matt. xxi.) It is taken up about doing, or not doing (Prov. xxiii. 1, 2; 1 Sam. xxv. 17; Judg. xviii. 14). David considered his ways, and, not finding them good, he ceased from walking any longer in them; and seeing God's ways the only good ways, he turned about, stepped into, and walked in them.

II. Wherein the strength of it lieth. 1. *In searching out the causes, effects, rising, progress, continuance, and issue of a thing.* 2. *In comparing things together and so drawing up that which may be most useful.* When all things are laid together, weighed, scanned over again and again, a man takes that which is most necessary, seasonable, suitable, and useful. 3. *In pressing to and*

assisting the soul in acting. When consideration hath drawn up what is to be done, or not to be done, then it puts upon the conscience as sinful, if not followed, and directs in the execution. Consideration lays an injunction upon men's wills and consciences to be doing. Did men in these days wisely consider the Lord's doings, they would fear, and declare the work of the Lord.

III. The excellency of it. 1. *It is that which God Himself doth* (Prov. xxiv. 12). The Lord considers, ponders, and weighs things, according to the language of Scripture (Ex. xxxiii. 13; Prov. v. 21; Deut. xxxii. 26, 27; Hos. xi. 8, 9). 2. *It differeth a man from brutes.* They are led by sense, and cannot distinguish whether an action ought to be done or not. This is man's privilege and power. But some are guided only by their senses. "Every man is brutish in his knowledge" (Jer. x. 14). Men do not reflect upon their actions and consider them; if they did, they would not be so sensual, so sinful (Isa. i. 3). 3. *It enables the understanding, completes a man, makes him wise and prudential* (Prov. xvii. 27). He who considers what advantage may be made of words, and therefore is sparing in speaking, shows the more understanding and excellency of spirit. Consideration looks inward, looks over the same thing again and again. We say, second thoughts are best, which implies that consideration ripens and perfects the man and his actions. 4. *It puts life into those principles and talents God hath given a man.* Like a drum in an army, that when it beats all stir and march; like a spring in a watch, when that goes all the wheels go. Did men consider what graces and gifts God hath given them, they would not let them lie still and fallow, but improve them. Consideration will set other's graces on work, and much more a man's own (Heb. x. 24).—(*Greenhill.*)

(Vers. 21–26.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The ways of life and death are here for all set forth. A man's own sins even, provided they are forsaken, will not exclude him from salvation. "The proof that every one must bear his sin did not contain an exhaustive reply to the question—in what relation the righteousness of God stood to the sin of man? For the cases supposed in vers. 5–20 took for granted that there was a constant persistence in the course once taken, and overlooked the instances, which are by no means rare, when a man's course of life is entirely changed. It still remained, therefore, to take notice of such cases as these, and they are handled in vers. 21–26. The ungodly man who repents and turns, shall live; and the righteous man, who turns to the way of sin, shall die."—(*Keil.*)

Ver. 21. "But if the wicked will turn." This was the real point of the controversy. God deals with each man as one who is capable of renouncing evil and choosing good, *i.e.*, He deals with each individual as a moral being.

Ver. 22. "They shall not be mentioned unto Him." They shall not be remembered against him (Jer. xxxi. 34). The guilt is blotted out of remembrance, though for the purposes of a salutary discipline the chastisements of God may be allowed to continue (Heb. xii. 10; 2 Sam. xii. 13, 14). "In his righteousness that he hath done he shall live." Not, *for* his righteousness, as if that is to be regarded as the procuring cause of his acceptance; but *in* it, righteousness being regarded as the fruit of his true conversion (Ezek. xx. 11).

Ver. 23. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" God had declared even that concerning the sacrificial victims He "had no pleasure in them." (Psa. xl. 6). He had no absolute and final pleasure in them, for they were ordained only

to shadow forth the one sacrifice for sin. The providing of that sacrifice would be the highest proof that God willed not the death of the sinner. "The motive for the pardon of the repenting sinner is here given, in the declaration that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but desires his conversion, that he may live. God is therefore not only just, but merciful and gracious, and punishes none with death but those who either will not desist from evil, or will not persevere in the way of His commandments. Consequently the complaint, that the way of the Lord, *i.e.*, His conduct toward men, is not weighed, *i.e.*, is not just and right, is altogether unfounded, and recoils upon those who make it. It is not God's ways, but the sinner's that are wrong."—(*Keil*).

Ver. 24. "**In his trespass.**" Referring to his *present* condition, which determines his real state. He "hath trespassed," and is therefore still "in his trespass."

Ver. 25. "**Yet ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal.**" They affirmed that God worked by no regular and uniform law or method. They repeat the charge in ver. 2, complaining that some were punished while others were spared, and hence they regarded the way of God as marked by caprice and not the result of a just law of working. "**Your ways.**" The prophet is continually urging his hearers to reflect and consider their "own ways" (Ezek. xvi. 61; xx. 43; xxxvi. 31).

Ver. 26. "**And dieth in them.**" Heb. "Dieth *upon* them." They are the footing upon which he stands when he is called to appear before God.

HOMILETICS.

The Equity of God's Government.

The unbelievers still imprudently contended that God's ways were not equal, though the contrary had been declared by the mouth of the prophet. The equity of God's dealings is re-asserted, and fresh instances and considerations are given by way of proof.

I. The case of the repentant sinner. He is dealt with not on the score of his past transgressions, but on the ground of his new obedience. When the sinner forsakes his way, the mercy of God steps in and accepts his repentance. 1. *Repentance, of itself, has no efficacy to procure pardon.* Whatever it might do to set us right in the future, it could not possibly undo the past. For *that* we should still have to reckon. 2. *Repentance is accepted through the mercy of God.* God is willing to forget the past and to receive the sinner. The pardon of sin is a special revelation, for nature teaches no doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. We transgress her laws and we are punished. We are not excused on the ground of ignorance. But God in His mercy accepts a genuine repentance. He will not punish the righteous man for his father's sins; and will not even remember against a man *his own sins*, if he repents. "Scripture represents forgiveness as the result, not of repentance, but of the death of Christ, 'in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins,' repentance being essential, not to the efficacy of His death, but to the *appropriation* of the benefits secured by it. Even if repentance, however, could save us, natural religion is unable to produce it. It is, in the evangelical true meaning of the term, such sorrow for sin as flows from a sense of the love and reverence due to God, and of the heinousness of sin against Him. The sorrow of the world is no such feeling. It is, on the contrary, blended with fears

and impressions which make it impossible to love God or draw near to Him."—(*Angus*).

II. The case of the man, once righteous, who abandons his righteous course. Such a man in his backsliding will not be supported by his early righteousness. It can have no merit to weigh against his faults. The integrity of the past cannot save him. Each man will be judged by himself, and in that state in which he is found.

III. God's motive in granting pardon to the repentant transgressor. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" (ver. 23). It is the pleasure of God that man should live and not die. God is not only just, but also merciful and gracious. He punishes none with death but those who will not abandon their sins, or who will not persevere in the way of His commandments.

IV. God only requires from man what is just and reasonable. It is surely just to render Him obedience, and to repent of our sin when we have wronged Him. We ought to be ready to accept what is offered to us through His mercy. Thus the complaint of these sinners against God was altogether unfounded, and only recoiled upon their own heads. And it is only just that repentance should be thorough. The unrighteous man must forsake "all" his sins (ver. 21), making no reservation in favour of "heart-idols" (Ez. xiv. 4). The *will* must be subdued "if the wicked man will turn from all his sins," etc. Thus it is not God's ways, but the sinner's, that are wrong, for God shows, in all His dealings with man, His abhorrence of sin and His love of righteousness.

Repentance not Efficacious.

We do not know what the whole natural or appointed consequences of vice are; nor in what way they would follow, if not prevented, and therefore can in no sort say, whether we could do anything which would be sufficient to prevent them. Our ignorance being thus manifest, let us recollect the analogy of Nature or Providence. For though this may be but a slight ground to raise a positive opinion in this matter, yet it is sufficient to answer a mere arbitrary assertion, without any kind of evidence, urged by way of objection against a doctrine, the proof of which is not *reason*, but *revelation*. Consider then: people ruin their fortunes by extravagance; they bring diseases upon themselves by excess; they incur the penalties of civil laws; and surely civil government is natural; will sorrow for these follies past, and behaving well for the future, alone and of itself, prevent the natural consequences of them? On the contrary, men's natural abilities of helping themselves are often impaired; or if not, yet they are forced to be beholden to the assistance of others, upon several accounts, and in different ways; assistance which they would have no occasion for, had it not been for their misconduct; but which, in the disadvantageous condition they have reduced themselves to, is absolutely necessary to their recovery, and retrieving their affairs. Now, since this is our case, considering ourselves merely as inhabitants of this world, and as having a temporal interest here, under the natural government of God, which, however, has a great deal moral in it; why is it not supposable that this may be our case also; in our more important capacity, as under His perfect moral government, and having a more general and future interest depending? If we have misbehaved in this higher capacity, and rendered ourselves obnoxious to the future punishment which God has annexed to vice, it is plainly credible that, behaving well for the time to

come may be—not useless; God forbid!—but wholly insufficient, alone and of itself, to prevent that punishment; or to put us in the condition which we should have been in had we preserved our innocence. And though the efficacy of repentance itself alone, to prevent what mankind had rendered themselves obnoxious to, and recover what they had forfeited, is now insisted upon, in opposition to Christianity; yet, by the general prevalence of propitiatory sacrifices over the heathen world, this notion of repentance alone being sufficient to expiate guilt, appears to be contrary to the general sense of mankind. The great doctrines of a future state, the danger of a course of wickedness, and the efficacy of repentance, are not only confirmed in the Gospel, but are taught—especially the last is—with a degree of light to which that of nature is but darkness.—*Butler's Analogy.*

(Ver. 25.)

Some may fancy, from some expressions used in this chapter, that the prophet is laying down a new law of God's dealings, as though the Almighty had been acting up to that time upon a certain principle, and now, henceforward, He were about to act upon a new and different principle. It is easy to put the subject in such a light that all difficulty will vanish. This is one end I have in view. But I have the further end of drawing from the subject some useful thoughts with respect to God's government in the world in these our days, and our own duties as creatures living under a government which at present we cannot wholly understand. The Jews complained of the law under which they lived as unjust; because it spoke of the sins of the father being visited upon the children: they used this proverb, "that the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The punishment which ought to have fallen upon the father fell upon his guiltless children. They complained that God's ways were not equal, not fair, not righteous. It was not as a mere piece of *philosophical speculation* that they held this language. There was a practical consequence belonging to the spread of the proverb of the sour grapes, which was of the highest importance. It was not a few unbelieving, acute, clever students of the law, who had detected this injustice in it. Had it been so, probably the prophet Ezekiel would not have made the discovery the subject of a general address; no, the thing had passed into a proverb, it was in the mouth of the people at large, and the practical consequence was that it held back the people from thinking of their sins which had brought them into trouble; and from repenting of those sins. Instead of this they would look upon themselves as victims of an unjust law—as persecuted rather than punished. The good effect of any punishment depends very much upon the criminal himself feeling and admitting that he is punished justly. Let a man feel this, and he may be led to sorrow and good resolutions for the time to come. But if he fancies that the law is in fault and not himself, that he is an injured man—the victim of cruel legislation—then punishment may make him sullen and obstinate, but it can never make him sorry for his fault. This was just the case with the Jews. They were punished for not keeping God's law. Ezekiel would have them see in their punishment the result of their own sins; would endeavour to lead them to that "Godly sorrow" which works repentance: but the devil, and those amongst men who did the devil's work, had a different version of the history. According to them, the law which the priests and prophets would fasten upon them was an unjust law, one which did not deserve their obedience. They would argue that from its own principles the people were not in need of repentance, for the law spoke of children suffering for their father's sins, and who could say but

that this very chastisement might be the punishment of sins committed long ago? Who could say but that their teeth were being set on edge, because their fathers had eaten sour grapes many years before?

It is clear that the proverb had a very direct bearing upon the conduct of the people. If the proverb generally found favour in their eyes, then it was of no use that Ezekiel should talk of sin and its punishment, and the need of repentance. Therefore Ezekiel protested against the proverb as wicked and profane; and he lays down the great truth which should destroy the effect of the lying proverb, that of the necessary punishment of sin: "the soul that sinneth it shall die." That was the truth which God had told man when He first made him, and the truth of all religion in all times.

Let us see what ground the Jews had to stand upon their proverb. It is evident that there was something which gave it colour and likelihood. Satan, as we know, can quote Scripture for his purpose, and Satan might have made a very good Scriptural defence of this proverb of the sour grapes. "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and shew mercy unto thousands in them that love Me and keep My commandments." Now, the Jews might say that their proverb only expressed as much as this passage. And it is to be observed, that the passage sets forth the *mercy* of God, because the *three* or *four* generations over which His curse extends are contrasted with the *thousands* to which He shews His love. The Jews might answer that still it did contain the principle of children suffering for sins which they had not committed, that this was unjust, and that it was no qualification of the injustice to say that in a vast number of instances children received rewards for good deeds which not they but their fathers had done. Now, how is this to be met? It is quite clear that the commandment does recognise the principle of the proverb, and that the people were smarting under it. The punishment which fell upon them was the result of a long course of national wickedness and idolatry, not the consequence of sins committed in their time only. How can we meet the objection and vindicate God's ways?

There were two mistakes in the view which the Jews took when they used the proverb. (1.) They took the expressions of God's law to mean, not that the character of sin was such that it sometimes extended beyond the actual doer of it, and brought grief upon others *besides* himself, but that it brought grief upon others *instead* of himself; as though when Adam sinned he had not brought death upon himself *and* his posterity, but had brought it upon his posterity and *not* upon himself. They would have it that the *children alone* suffered for what their fathers had done. (2.) The other error was this, that they seemed to have taken for granted that they were fair judges as to who was punished and who not. They assumed that the fathers had not suffered for the sour grapes which they had eaten; whereas they were manifestly not sufficient judges as to what amount of punishment had been meted out, or would be meted out to different men. The apparent prosperity of vice, and the apparent suffering of goodness and virtue, have always been difficult to understand. David found the difficulty in his day, and could not overcome it until he went into the sanctuary of God. Then it was that he was able to take a higher view of God's dealings with mankind, and so to understand the end of those men whose prosperity had so much astonished him. Ezekiel did not meet the proverb by telling the Jews that in future things should be ordered differently. He asserts the justice of God's ways, but he gives them a new truth to reflect upon, a truth not inconsistent with the principle asserted in the Second Commandment, but which must needs be borne in mind to guard against the perversion of that principle. Ezekiel asserts the truth which God spoke to Adam in the days of his purity—"In the day that thou eatest thou shalt die!" That

was the great practical truth upon which every human soul stood before God. God sends us all into the world with a conscience to tell us what is right and what is wrong, with certain commands to keep, a certain path to walk in; and He says to us all, "do these things that your soul may live." He may say to us at the same time, do these things that it may be well with you, and with your children after you; but whether this be said or not, still the responsibility for his own actions lies on the head of each man: if he sins, he dies; and no wrath which he may bring upon his children can save him from the consequences of his own sin. God did not say to Adam, if you disobey you will bring death upon your children; He only said—"In the day that thou sinnest, *thou* shalt die." Yet, though the consequence was not threatened the consequence came, and Adam's sin, which was to bring death to himself, brought death to his posterity besides. Ezekiel was not introducing any new principle of government, he was only asserting a principle as old as the creation. What he wished the people to believe was this—that although it had been held out as a warning against disobedience and an encouragement to obedience, that those who sinned were bringing in a curse which would affect others besides themselves, and that contrariwise those who were holy and good were bringing a blessing down upon their children, still this was not supposed to be in opposition to the great law of every man standing or falling by his own deeds, being "judged by the things done in the body, whether good or bad." There followed at once this practical consequence, that when they found themselves suffering under God's judgments they were not to speculate as to what sin it was of their fathers which had brought this grief upon them, but they were to look into their own hearts and examine their own conduct. Ezekiel would say to them, "Do not look to your fathers, but look to yourselves: you say that they sinned, and you are suffering for it; well, but think whether you do not deserve to suffer? Are you really better than your fathers? Have you no sins to repent of, no idolatry to forsake, no ungodliness to make you ashamed?" "Indeed," he might go on to say, "is not this itself a sufficient proof of the wicked state of your hearts, that you venture to attribute unrighteousness to God? You say that the ways of the Lord are not equal, but may it not be that His ways seem unequal just because your own are not equal themselves? The ways of God seem to you dark and confused, but may not the defect be in your own eyes?" He would assure them that, whatever unworthy thoughts Satan might put in their minds, yet certainly God loved them and had no pleasure in their death. "Make you a new heart, and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God, wherefore turn yourselves and live ye." These words would cut through all the speculative doubts of God's justice which the devil had raised; they would put religion upon the true practical ground of trusting in God's love, and therefore obeying His commands; and they would encourage men to walk in the narrow path of duty, leaving all difficulties to be solved by those wise words of Abraham, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

There is something repugnant to our idea of justice in the law that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children. But this principle was not all peculiar to the Jewish law. It is manifestly the principle upon which the world is governed. We see numberless instances in which, as a matter of fact, the son does suffer for what the father has done amiss. We say, "Of course it is so, it cannot be otherwise." Yes; but why *of course*? Why *must* it be so? Why *cannot* it be *otherwise*? And how comes it that we are linked together in such a mysterious manner, that we cannot help being affected by those over whom we have no control? Do you not see that this is God's doing? We may call it natural, or necessary, but after all it is the Lord's doing, however wonderful it may be in our eyes. And yet, when we see this law of God's

government we see nothing to surprise us, because we cannot imagine it otherwise. And we do not find that persons have any difficulty in practice because they suffer for their parent's faults. No one thinks it necessary to be idle and to starve, because his father was idle before him. No one doubts but that he has his own work to do, his own food to seek, his own soul to save, and that if his father forgot his duty, that is the very best warning to him not to do the like. And what follows? why this: that the same way of looking upon our condition here is to be applied in all cases. God did not put us here to explain difficulties, but to work out our salvation. God does not require us to shew how all His doings are the best and wisest that could be, but He requires us to do His will. Of all things that we have to learn, this is one of the chief and greatest, that our life here is to be a scene of active work. We are encompassed with mystery, above, below, and around us, and there is much in this world which our philosophy can never reach. God's ways are too deep to fathom, too large to measure. And who does not conclude that in the meanwhile he has great positive duties to fulfil, which no speculative difficulties can prevent him from fulfilling? "The soul that sinneth it shall die," though it was proved by the fall of Adam, was still more strikingly proved by the death of the spotless Lamb of God, the great offering for sin; and the truth that God wills not the death of a sinner was then proved in the most wonderful manner when God spared not His only Son that He might be able to pardon those who repent of their sins. The Old Testament denunciation, "the wages of sin is death," has this New Testament addition made to it, "but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."—*Goodwin's "Parish Sermons."*

(Vers. 27–32.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 29. **"Are not your ways unequal?"** "They asserted (ver. 25) that the ways of God were not right—properly, not weighed in the balance of righteousness (Job. xxi. 6)—but regulated by caprice. This assertion proceeded from defective consciousness of sin, that could find no other key to suffering than this, that it was decreed unrighteously, on account of the sins of the fathers. The prophet points to this, that the guilt lies on their side. If they only sincerely return to God, they will no more have cause to complain of Him."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 30. **"Therefore I will judge you."** "Therefore, because my way, and not yours, is right, I will judge you, every one according to his way. Repent, therefore, if ye would escape from death and destruction."—*Keil.*

Ver. 31. **"Make you a new heart and a new spirit."** "A man cannot, indeed, create either of these by his own power; God alone can give them (Ezek. xi. 19). But a man can and should come to God to receive them: in other words, he can turn to God, and let both heart and spirit be renewed by the spirit of God."—*Keil*

HOMILETICS.

An Earnest Call to Repentance (vers. 27–32).

The prophet would not content himself merely with vindicating the ways of God, and thus silencing his adversaries. His design was not to refute, but to save them. Hence he renews the call to repentance, and strengthens that call by several considerations.

I. A genuine repentance will be accepted. When a man considers and turns from his evil ways, and practises righteousness, God promises him life (ver. 27). But—1. *The repentance must be complete.* Mere outward reformation will not suffice. There must be no retaining of a few cherished sins. "All your transgressions" (ver. 3). 2. *Repentance must have special regard to their chief sins.* They are to "cast away" all their transgressions. This expression is used because their chief sin was the worship of idols. When the chief sin is conquered, the victory over the rest is easy.

II. God's judgment against impenitent sinners is sure. God will not change, and therefore man must, if he would escape destruction. It is men's ways that are unequal. The prophet cuts short the controversy with a "therefore." For the rule of God is invariable, and, therefore, they must decide whether it shall operate for, or against them. The sinner who persists in his impenitence is sure to be brought to ruin (ver. 30).

III. God would supply them with the necessary strength for the life of righteousness. "Make you a new heart and a new spirit" (ver. 31). Such a command to change themselves into a new nature, coming, as it does, from God, carries the gift of a new power. For God does not give to man impossible commands. There is something still for us to do, but the provisions and strength for our duty are supplied to us. The new man is "created after God's likeness," but believers are commanded to "put it on" (Eph. iv. 24). When Jesus called on the paralytic man to "*arise* and walk;" and said to the deaf man, "Be thou opened," with the command He gave the power to perform it.

IV. God's will and purpose are on the side of the repentant sinner. God is not a mere judge or monarch whose only care is to see that the law is outwardly obeyed, and that transgressors are punished. He is a loving Father, who mourns over the transgressions of His children and longs for their return to the privileges of their true home. He has no pleasure in their death. The sinner must charge himself with his own ruin. Surely the voice of the tenderest compassion is in the question, "For why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

(Ver. 31).

If anyone feels—I am fallen very low in the world—here all has been so much against me—my parents were the ruin of me—let him remember this one word of Ezekiel, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways and live?" Let him turn from his father's evil ways, and do that which is lawful and right, and then he can say with the Prophet, in answer to all the strokes of fortune and the miseries of circumstance, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall I shall arise." Provided he will remember that God requires of all men something, which is to be as good as they can be; then he may remember also that our Lord Himself says, "Unto to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." God's ways are not unequal. He has one equal, fair, and just rule for every human being; and that is perfect understanding, perfect sympathy, perfect goodwill, and therefore perfect justice and perfect love. And if any one answers in his heart—these are good words, and all very well, but they come too late. I am too far gone. I ate the sour grapes in my youth, and my teeth must be set on edge for ever and ever. I have been a bad man, or I have been a foolish woman too many years to mend now. I am down, and down I must be. I have made my bed, and I must lie on it, and die on it, too. Whoever you are who says that, unsay

it again, for it is not true. Ezekiel tells you that it is not true, and one greater than Ezekiel—Jesus Christ, your Saviour, your Lord, your God, tells you that it is not true. For what happens, by God's eternal and unchangeable laws of retribution, to a whole nation, or a whole family, may happen to you—to each individual man. They fall by sin; they rise again by repentance and amendment. They may rise punished by their sins, and punished for a long time, heavily weighted by the consequences of their own folly, and heavily weighted for a long time. But they rise—they enter into their own new life weak and wounded from their own fault. But they enter in. And from that day things begin to mend—the weather begins to clear, the soil begins to yield again—punishment gradually ceases when it has done its work, the weight lightens, the wounds heal, the weakness strengthens, and by God's grace within them, and by God's providence outside them, they are made men of again, and saved. So you will surely find it in the experience of life. No doubt, in general, in most cases, "the child is father of the man" for good and evil. A pious and virtuous youth helps, by sure laws of God, towards a pious and virtuous old age. And on the other hand, an ungodly and profligate youth leads, by the same laws, toward an ungodly and profitable old age. That is the law. But there is another law which may stop that law—just as the stone falls to the ground by the natural law of weight; and yet you may stop that law by using the law of bodily strength, and holding it up in your hand. And what is the gracious law, which will save you from the terrible law which will make you go on from worse? It is this—"When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." It is not said that his soul shall come in a moment to perfect health and strength. No. There are old, bad habits to be got rid of, old ties to be broken, old debts (often worse debts than any money debts) to be paid. But he shall save his soul alive. His soul shall not die of its disease. It shall be saved. It shall come to life, and gradually mend and be cured, and grow from strength to strength, as a sick man mends day-by-day, after a deadly illness—slowly it may be, but surely: for how can you fail of being cured if your physician is none other than Jesus Christ your Lord and your God. If you will but recollect that last word, you will never despair. How dare any man say—Bad I am, and bad I must remain—while the God who made heaven and earth offers to make you good? Who dare say, I cannot amend, when God Himself offers to amend you? Who dare say, I have no strength to amend, when God offers to give you strength, strength of His strength, and life of His life, even His Holy Spirit? Who dare say, God has given me up; He has a grudge against me which He will not lay by, an anger against me which cannot be appeased, a score against me which will never be wiped out of His book? Oh foolish and faint-hearted soul. Look, look at Christ hanging on His cross, and see there what God's grudge, God's anger, God's score of your sins is like. Love, love unspeakable, and nothing else. To wash out your sins, He spared not His only-begotten Son, but freely gave Him for you, to show you that God, so far from hating you, has loved you; that so far from being your enemy, He was your father; that so far from willing the death of a sinner, He willed that you and every sinner should turn from his wickedness and live. Now, even if you suffer somewhat in this life for your sins, that suffering is not punishment, but wholesome chastisement; as when a father chastens the son in whom he delighteth. Say not—I must be as I am—when Christ died that you should *not* be as you are. Say not—there is no hope—when Christ died and rose again, and reigns for ever, to give hope to you and all mankind, that when the wicked man turns away from the wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth

that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive, and all his transgressions shall not be mentioned unto him, but in his righteousness that he hath done shall he live.—("*All Saint's Day and other Sermons*," *by C. Kingsley.*)

LAMENTATION FOR THE MISERABLE FATE AWAITING THE PRINCES AND PEOPLE OF ISRAEL (Chap. xix.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 1–9. The prophet foresees the capture and exile of the Princes into Egypt and Babylon. This judgment to come on Israel is described under the parable of lion's whelps taken in a pit.

Ver. 1. "**A lamentation.**" "A *dirge* or *elegy*: a species of Hebrew poetry characteristic of the melancholy fate of those who are the subject of it, and the doleful feelings to which it gives utterance. Sometimes, as in that over Saul and Jonathan, it is exquisitely tender and pathetic. The royal personages here referred to, designated *princes of Israel*, were in reality those of the kingdom of Judah. They are so called because they were the only legitimate rulers of the Hebrew people. Those who had reigned over the ten tribes were, so far as the theocracy is concerned, merely usurpers."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 2. "**Thy mother.**" The mother of the people is Jerusalem (Ezek. xxi. 20; Gal. iv. 25). "**A lioness.**" "The people appear as a lioness on the ground of Gen. xlix. 9, to which passage the couching in particular refers (comp. Num. xxiii. 24, xxiv. 9; Isa. xxix. 1), because it was a royal people, of equal birth with other independent and powerful nations, as this royal nature was historically displayed, especially in the times of David and Solomon. The highest development of this lion-nature, the true verification of Gen. xlix. 9, 10, first came to pass in the future, in the appearance of the Messiah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. v. 5).—*Hengstenberg.* "**She lay down among lions.**" These lions are the other kingdoms of the world, the Gentile nations. Jerusalem—the people of Israel—lay down among them when she took her place in the family of nations (2 Sam. vii. 9). "**She nourished her whelps among young lions.**" "The whelps of the mother are the sons of the King of Israel. The bringing up of these among lions points to the fact that the kingdom of Israel was of equal birth with the mighty kingdoms of the heathen world."—(*Hengstenberg*).

Ver. 3. "**It learned to catch the prey; it devoured men.**" "The ignoble side of the lion-nature is here brought to view. The distance, however, is not very great: there is a close connection between the two sides. By the constitution of human nature, arrogance is inseparably connected with high rank, and therewith a rude barbarity towards all who stand in the way of self-will. He only who walks with God can escape this natural consequence; and the walk of faith is not the attainment of every man. It should, however, be the attainment of every man among the people of God; and where it fails, and the corrupt nature unfolds itself without resistance, there the vengeance of God takes effect. Jehoahaz proved to be a barbarous tyrant toward his own subjects; whereas, according to its constitution, the kingdom of Israel should exhibit a heroic power against the enemies of the people of God. For this reason he was punished." (*Hengstenberg*). "The thought is the following:—Why has Israel put itself upon a level with the heathen nations, and adopted the rapacious and tyrannical nature of the powers of the world? The question involves the reproof that Israel has struck out a course opposed to its divine calling, and will now have to taste the bitter fruits of this assumption of heathen ways."—(*Keil*).

Ver. 4. "And they brought him with chains unto the land of Egypt." The Heb. word means properly *hooks*, or *rings*, which were fastened in the noses of wild beasts, to which a chain or cord was attached in order to drag them about (Ezek. xxix. 4). This describes the fate of Jehoahaz, which is related in 2 Kings xxiii. 31, etc. The fetters which were fastened upon him correspond to the *ring* by which wild beasts were led about against their will (2 Kings xix. 28).

Ver. 5. "Now when she saw that she had waited, and her hope was lost." "While circumstances seemed to hold out some promise of the restoration of Jehoahaz, the Jewish people cherished some hope, but having been disappointed, their hope at last expired."—(*Henderson*). "Then she took another of her whelps, and made him a young lion." This was Jehoiachin (2 Kings xxiv. 8, etc.

Ver. 6. "And he went up and down among the lions." Jehoiachin affected great magnificence among the kings of the earth. He was ambitious to be numbered among the great lions of the nations (Jer. xxii. 14-15). "And learned to catch the prey, and devoured men." Jehoiachin, to gratify his ambition was guilty of oppression and bloodshed (Jer. xxii. 13–17).

Ver. 7. "And he knew their desolate palaces." Some adopt the reading, "*and he knew his widows and laid waste their cities.*" "The *knowing* denotes the practising of brutalities. *His*, that is, the king's widows, are the widows whom he, as king, was bound to protect. *His* widows are at the same time their, the people's, widows, the wretched and suffering. The subject is the king as a lion, as a hard and cruel man. There is an abridged comparison here: he acts towards the wretched, whom he was called on to protect, as one who injures a widow confided to his protection. The fulness of the land is that which lives and moves in it. The lion roars when he is about to rend; and this rending is to be added to the roar, as only thus the effect ascribed to the roar is explained." (*Hengstenberg*). "As in Isa. xiii. 22, the word in question is used poetically of widowed palaces, *i.e.*, forsaken of their inhabitants, so here ironically." (*Lange*).

Ver. 8. "The provinces." "The provinces are the surrounding countries, as parts of the Chaldean empire; comp. 2 Kings xxiv. 2, according to which the Syrians, Ammonites, and Moabites were summoned against Jehoiakim, the father of Jehoiachin."—(*Hengstenberg*).

Ver. 9. "Brought him to the king of Babylon." Jehoiachin was carried captive to Babylon, where, though a prisoner, he was treated with kindness by Evil-Merodach (2 Kings xxv. 27–30).

HOMILETICS.

Lamentation over Israel's fallen Royalty.

This lamentation is in the poetical form. Poetry is the natural companion of man's spirit through all the heights and depths of life and feeling. The greatest sorrows and joys must find their truest and highest expression in poetry. Hence the Book of Psalms retains its place as the hand-book of devotion for the Church of God.

I. Israel's kings had a noble origin (Gen. xlix., 9.) Their mother was Jerusalem—the city of God. "She lay down amongst the lions," she took her place among the family of nations. In King David, God made of Israel a great

name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth (2 Sam. vii. 9). Had the chosen nation continued faithful they would have remained in peace and prosperity. The greatness of the eminence to which they had been raised by the providence of God, gives a depth of sadness to this lamentation now made over them.

II. Israel's kings were corrupted by evil examples. The society of the great of the earth corrupted them in religion and morals (vers. 6, 7). They learned the worst vices of kings. Monarchs have special temptations arising from their position. They have opportunity to inflict the greatest wrongs upon mankind; such as tyranny, oppression, etc. They learn to "prey" upon men, yea, to "devour" them. Men are "devoured" when they are bereft of liberty and of life by tyrants.

III. The violence and cunning of Israel's kings provoked the same in others. The lion had learned to catch the prey, and to affright the nations by the noise of his roaring. But he was not victorious. He only stirred up among the nations the same feelings which raged within himself, and provoked revenge (ver. 8). The most powerful tyrants must reap the reward of their own doings. The measure they mete shall surely be measured to them again.

IV. The evil examples of Israel's kings failed to teach the people wisdom. When they saw that their hope was gone they elected another king. This new king walked after the manner of the rest (vers. 5-7). The nation suffered also under him as they must do under all bad kings. His projects were wicked, violent, and wild, fitly represented by the roaring of the lion. Nations sometimes become so maddened that they repeat those mistakes which, as they ought to know, must plunge them in ruin.

V. God has ways to punish the most powerful princes. God uses the passions and inventions of men to punish those who commit wickedness in high places. He has chains, pits, hunters, nets, and cages for wicked kings. Often by court intrigues and by the jealousies of nations He brings them to judgment. His judgments upon such may be long delayed, but they are sure to come in the end.

> "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
> Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all."

God will bring tyrants to an end. At last the lions' roaring on the mountains dies away (ver. 9). Sooner or later, "the wicked cease from troubling."

(Ver. 9.)

1. *The hopes of the wicked are not long-lived.* They are soon dashed and disappointed. "The hope of unjust men perisheth," and that easily and speedily (Prov. xi. 7). It is likened to a spider's web or house, a little thing; a besom sweeps away the house and inhabitant together, and that in a moment: such is the hope of wicked men, it is suddenly and easily ruined. There is a difference between the hopes of the righteous and those of the wicked: "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish" (Prov. x. 28). 2. *Corrupt states are so addicted to their princes that they will set them up to rule over them, though it be to their own ruin.* Jerusalem, the lioness, sets "up another of her whelps, and makes it a young lion." She put this whelp into the royal seat, and stirred him up to do lion-like, such things as did unto himself and Jerusalem also. She learned nothing by the loss of her former whelp, but proceeds in her old way, and would have lions, tyrants to be over her, she, being a lioness, very corrupt and wicked, couples with that Egyptian lion, Pharoah, and brings forth, advances a lion like themselves. The men of Shechem made Abimelech king, but he proved not only a bramble to scratch them, but a fierce and fiery lion to consume them.

States had better consider whom they set over them, lest they become lions unto them. 3. *Such as men live amongst and converse withal, such they prove.* "He went up and down among the lions, and became a lion. Those lions he conversed with talked of making themselves great, of having their wills, of ruling by prerogative, and these things, and such like, were soon learned by this whelp. When Nebuchadnezzar was among beasts, he became brutish, and did as they did. Ill company is the Delilah that bewitches, defiles, and ruins many in their estates, bodies, and souls. David knew this, therefore he said, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity" (Psa. vi. 8); and "I am a companion of them that fear thee" (Psa. cxix. 63). 4. *They who converse with wicked ones do not only become wicked, but many times they prove eminently wicked.* They exceed their teachers. Jehoiachin, by his converse with lions, became not only a lion to catch the prey, but such an one as devoured men, defiled widows, made desolate palaces, laid waste cities, and the land also. He went beyond other tyrants, he was an inventor of wickedness, and profited above others in his way, and came to a perfection of iniquity. It is incident to man's nature to outstrip one the other, if not in good, yet especially in evil. 5. *Tyranny is hateful unto heathens.* "Then the nations set against him on every side." Jehoiachin was such a roaring lion that the heathens would not endure him. Doubtless the princes of the nations were tyrannous themselves, yet this man exceeded so in his tyrannical practices that he incurred the displeasure and hatred of them all. Tyrants cease to be men, and become beasts; therefore here are called lions, and are ranked among wild savage creatures; which none can endure. When there are wild beasts in a land, all are against them, and often there is a mutual agreement and concurrence to destroy them. The nations agreed to hunt and take this lion. 6. *God hath times, means, ways to catch lions, to deal with covetous and cruel men.* When Jehoiachin made desolate the palaces, and wasted the cities and the land; then the Lord stirred up the nations. They were His net, His pit, His instruments to take this lion withal. God wants not means to take them; He hath nations at command, and can call them forth and set them to hunt lions when he pleases (Jer l. 7. *Tyrannical princes are not of long continuance.* They are usually short-lived; either they lose their power, or their power and lives both. Jehoiachin roared and played the lion eleven years, and then he was taken in the pit of the nations and lost his power. So Jehoahaz before him. He tyrannized months, and then was taken. When potentates oppress and tyrannize, their ruin is at hand. God hath said, "Bloody men shall not live out half their days" (Psa. lv. 23). And He makes it good. "He cuts off the spirit of princes, and is terrible to the kings of the earth" (Psa. lxxvi. 12). 8. *God takes away wicked and tyrannical princes that it may be well with His people, that Zion may have the benefit of it.* Jehoiachin was taken, chained, carried to Babylon, and put in strongholds, and why?—"that his voice should be heard no more upon the mountains of Israel;" that the people of God might not be terrified with his roarings, nor torn with his teeth, but might enjoy freedom and safety. God, for the good of His people, destroys or drives out the wild beasts. "No lion shall be there" (Isa. xxxv. 9).—(*Greenhill*).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 10–14. The prophet laments for the destruction of the kingdom, and banishment of the people, under the parable of a wasted vine.

Ver. 10. "Like a vine in thy blood." The royal vine of Judah was torn up when Jehoiachin was carried captive to Babylon. That vine was planted afresh in the person of Zedekiah, so that the life of the whole plant depended upon him. The very sap of that royal tree was his blood. Some

render, "*in thy likeness*;" but this is forced, and gives no suitable meaning.

Ver. 11. "**Strong rods.**" "These represent princes of the royal house. In her prosperous state, the Jewish kingdom, so far from resembling one of those vines which creep upon the ground, was comparable to one trained up by the side of a wall, or supported by a tree. Some of these are carried to a great height, such as that mentioned by Schulz, the stem of which was a foot and a-half in diameter, and about thirty feet high, while its branches formed a tent of upwards of fifty feet square."—*(Henderson.)* "**Thick branches.**" The branches of forest trees. The once lowly vine now appears towering above oaks and cedars, yet is still without fruit (Ezek. xv. 6).

Ver. 12. "**But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground.**" "Without the intervention of anything further, there follows its splendid growth, like a lightning flash from the clear heavens, the complete overthrow of the vine, *i.e.* of Jerusalem —Judah, the birth-place of kings, and therewith the Davidic kingdom. While vers. 2–9 bewailed the existing kings, both as bearers of the Davidic royalty, and at the same time as suggestive, by their fate, to the actual king; now Zedekiah, as he with whom the Davidic kingdom is subverted, becomes the subject of the lament, just as if everything had already happened."—(*Lange*).

Ver. 13. "**And now she is planted in the wilderness.**" Figuratively describes the captivity, when David's stock was transplanted into the "wilderness" of Babylonia (Ezek. xx. 35).

Ver. 14. "**And fire is gone out of a rod of her branches, which hath devoured her fruit.**" Zedekiah was the vain-glorious rod of this vine. The very rod itself supplied the fire which burned up the whole tree. "It was his revolt from Nebuchadnezzar which caused that monarch to march his army into Judea, take Jerusalem, and carry the Jews captive to Babylon. Thus an end was put to the vine and its branches—a consummation which every Jewish patriot must deeply have bewailed."—*(Henderson.)* "**This is for a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.**" "The lamentation is (properly was, with prophetic anticipation of the future) for a lamentation: it is not the fancy of a gloomy seer, but the prediction of a lamentation, which will actually flow in a thousand voices from the mouth of the people. What Ezekiel here pronounces, the people will too soon be compelled to repeat after him. His lamentation is, as it were, the sowing, out of which a rich harvest of lamentation grows. At present the sky is full of joyous music to the people; but very soon it will be said: "My harp is turned to mourning, and my flute to the voice of weeping."—*(Hengstenberg.)*

HOMILETICS.

Lamentation for the Kingdom of Judah.

Two things concerning the fate of the kingdom of Judah, most of all, sorely touched the prophet's mind and heart.

I. It was fallen from a high estate. Judah was once a goodly vine, and blest above all others. She was the planting of the Lord. Her elevation to the greatest privileges serves sadly to reveal the depth of her fall.

II. It was doomed to destruction. The destruction was sudden and overwhelming. For immediately before she was full of happiness and splendour, great among the nations, and wielding the rod of power. Their destruction

was brought about by the wrath of God. "She was plucked up in fury" (ver. 12). When nations cease to acknowledge God, He turns the glory and growth of centuries into a desert. National sins spread like fire, and wrap whole kingdoms in the flames of destruction. The end of sin is "lamentation"—for individuals, for nations. Judah's kingdom fell, like others before and after it, because it failed to maintain righteousness. There is only one king who can deliver the nations and reign over them for ever and ever. "The Messianic hope was bound up with the Davidic kingdom, whose subversion is here illustrated, and its fulfilment is shown in this, that He who appeared in the world, declared, not without reference to this chapter, 'I am the true vine'" (*Lange*).

(Vers. 10, 11.)

1. *States and kingdoms, ruined in times of war and trouble, flourish again in times of quiet and silence.* Tyranny, oppression, wars, pull down, root up, destroy; but when there is peace and rest, it is otherwise. "They built and prospered," and why? they had "rest on every side." When roaring lions are taken away, and men of peaceable and quiet spirits succeed, then the vine grows, then the land prospers, then breaches are repaired. 2. *It is through the goodness and blessing of God that wasted kingdoms do become as vines, and flourish again.* "Thy mother is like a vine, fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters." God watered the kingdom with blessings; He gave peace, He gave the poor strength to labour, He rained upon them, and gave sap to the vine, that she was fruitful. When God lays waste his vineyards, then He commands "the clouds that they rain no rain upon it" (Isa. v. 6); but when He causes it to flourish, then He calls forth the rain, He moistens the spirits of men of all sorts, to contribute their help, thoughts and counsels for the good of the kingdom. He stirs up the spirits of men to be doing for the public; He gives people planted by Him many waters, many blessings. 3. *When mercies are multiplied, men are apt to abuse them, and swell with the enjoyment of them.* This metaphysical vine, the kingdom of Judah, had "strong rods her stature was exalted among the thick branches, and she appeared in her height with the multitude of her branches." She grew up again to a height, greatness. She had a multitude of branches, variety of mercies, and these swelled her so, that she became proud, insolent, and despised others. Prosperity is a dangerous thing, and hath hazarded many. The Babylonian kingdom was so rich, great, populous, and plentiful that it was called "the lady of kingdoms," and she herself said, "I shall be a lady for ever." She prided herself in her prosperity (Isa. xlvii. 5, 7), so spiritual Babylon (Rev. xviii. 7). "I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow." After Hezekiah had received many mercies, "his heart was lifted up" (2 Chron. xxxii. 23–25). Rehoboam, when he was strengthend in the kingdom, "forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him;" here was a sad effect of prosperity (2 Chron. xii. i). This people were seldom the better for mercies and blessings bestowed upon them; "I spoke unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyest not my voice" (Jer. xxii. 21). She had forgotten the caution the Lord gave her in the days of her infancy (Deut. viii. 11–14).—(*Greenhill*).

(Ver. 13).

"And now she is planted in the wilderness." This wilderness was Babylon, which was a fruitful, pleasant, and well-watered country; the city and land

were the "glory of kingdoms (Isa. xiii. 19). It had variety of rivers (Psa. cxxxvii. 1). Now if this were the nature of the country, how is it here called a wilderness? It is so called, not in respect of itself, but in reference to the Jews, who being captives therein, were as in a wilderness. In a wilderness, a man is destitute of all comforts and exposed to many dangers; so were the Jews in Babylon. 1. *They were destitute of comforts.* They came naked into Babylon, where they were amongst a people of a barbarous and unknown tongue, that knew nothing of God; there they had no form of a Church or State; they had no life, but were as dry bones (Ezek. xxxvii. 11). There they were captives; Babylon was a prison unto them, and prisons of what kind soever are not pleasing. Prisoners endure much hunger and thirst, and doubtless so did the Jews in Babylon. Though there were plenty, yet they had little enough, and therefore it was a "dry and thirsty land" to them. 2. *They were exposed to many dangers.* They were amongst those that mocked and hated them. The Babylonians were "bitter and hasty, terrible and dreadful" (Hab. i. 6, 7). They were like wild beasts in the wilderness, and sought, upon all occasions, to make a prey of the poor captive Jews. They got the three children into the fiery furnace, Daniel into the lion's den, and Haman attempted the total ruin of them. "She is planted." Before (ver. 12), it is said, "the fire consumed them." What is consumed in the fire is burnt to ashes, and how can that be planted? He doth not say the whole vine was burnt, but her "strong rods" were broken off and burnt; some were burnt and consumed by famine, some by the plague, some by the sword (2 Chron. xxxvi. 17). "The king of the Chaldees slew their young men with the sword;" but "they that escaped the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they were servants to him and his sons" (ver. 20). If it should be granted that the whole vine was dried up, withered, and burnt to ashes, yet these words may bear a good and sound sense, viz., thus:—they may be understood of Jehoiachin and those that were with him in Babylon at that time when they were spoken; for the words run in the present tense, "she is planted," not, she shall be planted, for Zedekiah and those that escaped the sword were carried after this prophecy to Babylon.—(*Greenhill.*)

The Past, Present, and Future of Israel (Chap. xx.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — The date given in ver. 1 applies also to chap. xx–xxiii. (compare chap. xxiv. 1). These four chapters are bound together by their contents into one group of connected words of God, and also by the threefold repetition of the expression, "wilt thou judge?" (chap. xx. 4; xxii. 2; xxiii. 36). The prophet is appointed to judge the people, *i.e.*, to make manifest their sin to them, and to predict the punishment. In vers. 1–4, we have the date, occasion, and subject of the prophetical discourse.

Ver. 1. "In the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month." There is a Jewish tradition that the tenth day of the fifth month was the day on which the "Sentence of Wandering" was passed (Num. xiv. 29). It is remarkable that this was also the same day on which the Temple was burnt both by the Chaldeans (Jer. lii. 12, 13), and according to the testimony of Josephus, by the Romans. This chapter (in which Num. xiv. is several times referred to) announces a new and a far heavier "Sentence of Wandering" (vers. 35–38). "If we compare the date given in ver. 1 with chap. viii. 1, we shall find that this word of God was uttered only eleven months and five days after the one in chap. viii.; two years, one month, and five days after the call of Ezekiel to be a prophet (chap. i. 2); and two years and five months before the blockading of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (chap. xxiv. 1). Consequently it falls almost

in the middle of the first section of Ezekiel's prophetic work."—(*Keil*). "To enquire of the Lord." Heb. "to seek Jehovah," *i.e.*, to ask, a revelation from Him.

Ver. 3. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you." "The Lord's answer is similar to that in chap. xiv. 3. Instead of giving a revelation concerning the future, especially with regard to the termination of the penal sufferings, which the elders had, no doubt, come to solicit, the prophet is to judge them, *i.e.*, as the following clause explains, not only in the passage before us, but also in chap. xxii. 3, and xxiii. 36, to hold up before them the sins and abominations of Israel. It is in anticipation of the following picture of the apostacy of the nation from time immemorial that the sins of the fathers are mentioned here."—(*Keil*). "No reply is given to the sinners, but chiding for their sins; and He adds the oath, 'As I live,' that the sentence of refusal may be all the stronger."—(*Jerome*). When Saul "enquired of the Lord," we are told that "the Lord answered him not" (1 Sam. xxviii. 6).

Ver. 4. "Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge them?" The repeated question has the force of a command, yea, even implies that a necessity is laid upon the prophet to pronounce judgment. "The Hebrew word signifies, not merely *to judge*, but also frequently, as here, to conduct a cause before a tribunal by adducing or hearing such evidence as bears upon it, and shall lead to the delivery of a righteous sentence." (*Henderson.*) "The question is repeated in the liveliness of emotion. It is a question of impatience, to which things go too slowly, and show how little right they have to look for grace, or expect a pleasing answer. The son of man cannot go soon enough for the Lord to the work of judgment and punishment for sin, which is here alone announced, and is to be executed in his name. Those who wish to have another answer, must repent beforehand. The summons to make known to them the sins of their fathers, points to this, that the evil is deep-seated, and a radical cure is to be desired, which can only be effected by a judgment of inflexible rigour."—(*Hengstenberg.*) "Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers." The evil which called for judgment had entered the very life of the nation. They inherited it like a disease—like a bad name. But the prophet not only mentions the sins of their fathers in order to show the magnitude of their guilt, but also that they might see how great was the patience and long-suffering of the Lord.

HOMILETICS.

The Elders before Ezekiel.

This is a very different result from that which we might have expected. We might have been inclined to say of the elders, that they could not have inquired of the Lord once, but they have learned wisdom from adversity, and they are come to enquire now. And so Ezekiel would also have said to these elders had they come in the right spirit and temper of mind; as penitents, with sorrow and contrition of heart, bemoaning their past obstinacy and rebellion, and beseeching God to receive their cries of earnest sorrow and their promises to do better things in the future. Had they so come they would have been well received. That prophet who was commissioned to say, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right he shall save his soul alive," and again, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth," and the like—the prophet who was

charged with such messages as these could never have been commissioned to drive away with hard reproachful words any true penitent, who came to enquire of the Lord by him.

This is the point in which the elders failed. *There is no evidence of their penitence.* They came to enquire of the Lord without first repenting and bringing forth works meet for repentance. Look at ver. 35, and the great reason will be seen why the enquirers were rebuffed, "When ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, "*even unto this day*"—even to *this day*; you perceive that their sins were not events of the past, but things going on in full vigour up to this very time. It was in the midst of these unrepented sins that they were come to enquire of the Lord; "and shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel?"—so the verse continues—"As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you." Here you have the repetition of the words of the text. The prophet is then commissioned to make known the abominations of their fathers. He shows them that they were as guilty as their fathers, and more guilty, because they had more teaching, more experience, more examples. And yet without any repentance, they expect that they are to be permitted to enquire of the Lord acceptably, but no—God will not be mocked; He will hear the penitent, but not the self-satisfied sinner.

There was nothing harsh and unreasonable in the answer which Ezekiel gave to the elders. He did not send the hungry empty away, but only as God's ambassador refused to answer those who would not leave their sins behind them when they entered into the Temple of God. These elders wished to make a *mere convenience* of the oracle of God. They might have enquired of God *continually*, but they did nothing of the kind. But when they found themselves in distress, and knew not which way to turn, then they presented themselves before God's prophet. They were brought to enquire of God not by love, not by a sense of duty, not even by habit, but merely by a desire to find their way out of difficulties from which they were unable to discover any human means of escape.

We see, in the first place, that they were not hardly dealt with; and, secondly, that the whole story *may be useful by way of parable to teach people how they must enquire of God if they would enquire aright.* It is well that we should look into this matter carefully; for we are apt to give an unlimited interpretation to what we read of God's mercy in hearing prayer, that we perhaps forget that there are very important limitations, and that a prayer may sometimes obtain no answer because there is something amiss in him who makes it. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is an instance. The Pharisee who went up to the Temple to pray was a very respectable elder apparently, something much more than respectable if we attend to his own account of himself,—yet this Pharisee received no answer, was not *justified* as the Gospel has it. God would not be enquired of by such. This is an instance of unsuccessful prayer. Let us consider what the true conditions of successful prayer are—

I. True religion is emphatically a walking with God. It is not a mere occasional *coming to Him.* A certain amount of reproach seems to be implied in the manner in which the day of the visit of the elders is accurately set down; it was "in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month." These visits of the elders were few and far between, there was no danger of confounding one with another. In chap. viii., we read, that "in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month," there was a similar visit to the prophet, and there appears to have been none between; so that nearly a year separated the one visit from the other. The precise manner in which the date is given may be taken as conveying a reproof to those who, instead of

making it their constant business to know God's will, were contented to let a year elapse between two successive visits to the prophet. *Walking with God* is the scripture phrase which well describes that constant nearness to God, that affinity of heart and affections, which the really religious man strives for. The notion of *life*, too, expresses the same thing. Religion is a *life*, by which word we intend to express, that it is not a series of irregular spasmodic efforts, not an enquiry of God now and then, not a coming to His prophet in the sixth year and the sixth month, and again in the seventh year and the fifth month, but an enquiry in all years and all months and all days, a habit of opening our hearts and consciences to Him, and of guiding our conduct by the answers which we are able to obtain.

II. We must leave our sins behind us when we come to enquire of God. The severe answer which the elders received was due to the fact that they came without first repenting. As a further illustration of this we find, that in their former visit, their presence at once brought upon the prophet a vision of the sins of the people. The prophet's eyes wandered in spirit to Jerusalem, and there he saw all the abominations of the house of Israel; there were men offering their incense to idols, and saying, "The Lord seeth us not;" there were women weeping for Tammuz; worse than all, there were men bowing down in worship to the sun of the creation, not the Creator. These visions rose to Ezekiel's prophetic eye when the elders came and sat before him; and because they contained precisely the explanation of all the misery under which the people groaned. The elders may come and sit before the prophet and bemoan their captivity, but of what profit will that be? That will not cure the disease. The disease is *unrepented sin*, and without a change here there can be no acceptance, no answer to prayer. Self-examination, earnest efforts to forsake the evil and to do the good, must ever be the preparations for successful inquiry of God. Prayer is not a thing which is at our command at any moment. *Sinners* can come to Christ, but they must leave their *sins*. John the Baptist came as the herald of Christ, and because he did so, his chief text was: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." No other way is sure but this; nothing else can save us from the possibility of such a rebuke as that in the text, "As I live," etc. The history brings before us this lesson also, that—

III. Prayer, or coming to God in any way, must not be made a mere matter of convenience, but must be regarded as a matter of constant spiritual necessity. These elders came when they thought it would answer their purpose. They forgot God when all went well, they sought Him when they were at their wit's end; they did not look upon communion with God as the one great spiritual need of their souls. They were a type of the mass of mankind. Large numbers of our fellow creatures do live in utter neglect of God. They live without prayer, and without the Scriptures—passing a quiet, animal kind of life, with no cares except those of getting daily bread. And yet many of these persons will cry to the Lord in trouble; put them upon a sick-bed, and they will say their prayers, for the most part, vigorously enough. This is no right use of prayer, but a most unchristian abuse. It was never intended that man should be careless while in health, and religious in sickness; never intended that young men should be dissipated and only old men sober and chaste; never intended that the best of a Christian's life and strength should be given to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and only the dross and refuse to Him who made him and redeemed him. Prayer was never intended to be made use of as a convenience when earthly aid fails, but to be the medium of communication with God, the means of gaining continual aid and daily blessing from Him. "Pray without ceasing" is the best text to enforce our duty. These did *not* "pray without ceasing." It was but an occasional work, a remedy resorted to in the last

extremity, a death-bed cry for help. If we were independent creatures and lived by our own strength and energy, *then* we might be content to make our approaches to Him rare and exceptional, and only necessary when called for by special circumstances. But what a false view would this be of our relation to Him in whom we live and move and have our being, who alone is able to help us, whom to know is life eternal! And how comforting, how satisfying is that view which represents God as a Father ever ready to bless us, and to whom, therefore, if we pray at all, we can scarcely fail to pray without ceasing!—(*Goodwin's "Parish Sermons."*)

Ver. 1. It is enough to say merely that they came to inquire, for from the prophet's mode of answering them we see that they made no inquiry as to deliverance and the way of salvation; they were troubled as to political things, the duration of the exile, the end of the Babylonish power, the issue of Zedekiah's faithlessness. We, too, ask, Watchman, what of the night? rather than, How shall I find grace? Why are we so concerned about the future? It will be like our past. We should be deeply concerned on account of our past. In our approaches to God, humility and reverence should be combined with a strong and assured faith, which must acquiesce in the authority of the one God, and yet must not object to hear God speak through his servants. Summon thyself to the study of the prophets and apostles through whom God has spoken! God will be inquired of, but still more should His will, which is sufficiently known to us, be done. To call on God, and yet not to obey Him is an abomination in His sight. "He heareth not sinners" (John ix. 31; Isa. i. 15). Vers. 2, 3. God's suggestive silence, and His more suggestive answer. God in the mouth, and idols in the heart, a most critical condition. God speaks not the smallest word of comfort to hypocrites. For hypocrites there is in the heart of God, and in the Holy Scriptures, no other counsel but to sincere repentance (Isa. lv. 7). Thus these elders were not in a condition to hear God's word. God hides Himself from those who hear His word with their gaze fixed only on their idols. They have no part in God's word.—(*Lange*).

(Ver. 1.)

1. *The Lord keeps an exact account of his people's sufferings.* Be the time long or short, He observes, "In the seventh year, fifth month, and tenth day;" that was of their captivity. The Lord forgot not how long they had been in Babylon, He notes how the time of their trouble passes. They were captives in Babylon, suffered hard things; but God took notice of the time, and how the years ran out. It is not said only that the woman had a spirit of infirmity, but the time is recorded also, she had it eighteen years (Luke xiii. 11). Also in John v. 5, not only the man and his infirmity is mentioned, but the time also how long, thirty-eight years. God tells the years, months, and days that His people endure adversity. Seventy years were determined that they should be in Babylon (Jer. xxix. 10, 11), and God gave them to see; He observed as well, yea, better than they, how they passed. 2. *The time of men's doing some things is specially noted by the Lord.* The time of these elders coming to inquire of the Lord is recorded. See how the actions of Josiah are observed (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3). When Jeroboam feasted and sacrificed to the calves he had made, God took notice of the month and day (1 Kings xii. 32). When the persecution of the Church was, God took notice of it; "at that time" (Acts viii. 1). 3. *Hypocrisy is a close sin, and is in those ofttimes we little think.* It is found where it was not expected, "in the elders of Israel;" those who here came to Ezekiel, pretending piety, sat before him, as if they would hearken to whatsoever the Lord should say, and do it; yet they intended no such thing, but were resolved to go on in their own ways, and to be as the Babylonians and heathens (ver. 32), so that they might enjoy peace and safety. So those who came to Christ

(Matt. xxii. 16-18), they carried a foul business very smoothly. There are many who will be found hypocrites at last, who now frequent the assemblies and come to hear the word of God, but do it not. 4. *To inquire and ask counsel of the prophets and man of God, is of ancient standing and warrantable.* Their coming was not unlawful, but their coming sinfully. It was a frequent practice of old to consult with the prophets (1 Sam. ix. 9; 1 Kings xxii. 15; 2 Kings viii. 8; Jer. xxi. 2; xxxvii. 7); and their coming to them was coming to the Lord. What though, now there are no prophets nor apostles immediately inspired and infallible to consult withal, yet there are pastors and teachers with whom Christ hath promised to be to the end of the world. 5. *The prophets were to give out the Lord's mind in His name and words.* "Speak unto the elders of Israel, and say, thus saith the Lord God." He must not say, thus saith Ezekiel, but, "Thus saith the Lord." That which is from the Lord hath a divine stamp upon it, a divine power in it; but that which is man's is like himself, frail and feeble. 6. *When men come to God or His ordinances with hypocritical hearts, they get nothing of Him.* "Come ye to inquire of me? as I live, I will not be inquired of by you." Job, speaking of a hypocrite, saith, "Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him?" (Job xxxii. 9). If men's hearts be not upright, sincere, let them pray and cry in prayer, let them come to a prophet and ask counsel and wait, God respects them not, will not answer them. "The way of the Lord is strength to the upright" (Prov. x. 29). What is the way of the Lord? Prayer, hearing of the word, asking counsel of His prophets and servants, are the ways of the Lord. In these He appears, is found, lets out strength; but it is when men are upright, not hypocritical. 7. *Hypocrites may deceive the prophets and servants of God.* Ezekiel thought that they were good men, and worthy of a better entertainment at the hands of God, but he was deceived. Simon Magus demeaned himself so that he begat a good esteem in the heart of Philip, and was admitted to baptism (Acts viii. 13). False apostles had got into the church at Ephesus, and had for a time gained too much upon the angel thereof (Rev. ii. 2). 7. *Hypocrites are not to be pleaded for.* "Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge them? God would not have the prophet to plead for or excuse them. Hypocrites are not always the greatest of sinners, but they are ever the worst of sinners. The devil is never more devil than when he transforms himself into an angel of light. The Jews were "a hypocritical nation" (Isa. x. 6; Jer. vii. 9, 10); and, therefore, God forbids Jeremiah to pray for them (Jer. xiv. 11). And what if they should pray themselves? You have an answer in Job. xiii. 16; God tells you that "an hypocrite shall not come before Him," that is to have acceptance of His person, or hear any comfortable answer from Him. 9. *The prophets and servants of God, when they are inquired of by men, must not proceed according to their desires, but they must wait for the mind of God and do answerably thereunto.* "Wilt thou judge them, son of man? Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers?" They would have thee inquire of Me for them, but I will not be inquired of, they shall not have their desires. Go thy ways, lay before them the abominable things their fathers have done. Not the people's desires, nor the prophet's fancies, must be his direction, when he is to make answer to those that inquire; but the will of God made known by His word and Spirit.—(*Greenhill.*)

(Vers. 5–9

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The election of Israel in Egypt, where God made Himself known to them by wonders and signs, and promised to become their God. Israel's ingratitude, though the Lord brought them out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Ver. 5. "When I chose Israel." God chose them for high purposes, of His own free grace, and not for any deserving on their part (Deut. vii. 6, 7; x. 15; viv. 2). "Lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob." The reference is plainly to the lifting up of the hands, as in the act of swearing (Gen. xiv. 22). "I am the Lord your God." This was God's ancient promise renewed to Moses (Ex. vi. 6–8).

Ver. 6. "Had espied." "God, as it were, spied out this land for them, sought it out with the greatest care as the best."—(*Hengstenberg*). "The glory of all lands." It was a "goodly land" (Deut. viii. 7–9), even in its physical characteristics: but eminently "glorious" (Dan. xi. 16, 41, 45), because it was the scene where the glories of the Son of God were displayed. It was the land from which the streams of salvation should flow all over the earth.

Ver. 7. "The abominations of His eyes." The worship of visible objects which Israel had substituted for the invisible God. "Defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt." "The election of the Israelites to be the people of Jehovah, contained *eo ipso* the command to give up the idols of Egpyt, although it was at Sinai that the worship of other gods was for the first time expressly prohibited (Ezek. xx. 3), and Egyptian idolatry is only mentioned in Lev. xvii. 7."—(*Keil*).

Ver. 8. "Neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt." "History does not expressly mention such a revolt of the people in Egypt; yet we are led indirectly to this by the statements of the books of Moses concerning the perpetual tendency of the people in the wilderness to the customs of Egypt. To this belongs, *e.g.*, the making of the golden calf, in which there is an imitation of the Egyptian worship of the brute; further (Lev. xvii. 17), according to which Israel in the wilderness served he-goats. The worship of a deity under the form of a he-goat was peculiar to Egypt (Lev. xviii. 3), when the people are admonished; "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do." That the Israelites generally served idols in Egypt is attested by Josh. xxiv. 14; and this being so, it is to be expected beforehand that this inclination would not immediately cease after the true God had made Himself known to them. The murmuring also of the people in Egypt again Moses and Aaron (Ex. v. 21), implies an under-current of Egyptian tendencies." — (*Hengstenberg*). The evidence furnished by Josh. xxiv. 14). established the fact that the Israelites practised idolatry in Egypt. Israel had to be redeemed, not so much from the bondage of Pharaoh as from "the gods of Egypt" (Ex. xii. 12), whom Pharaoh and his magicians served. The whole controversy with Pharaoh turned on the question, would he allow Israel to *serve the Lord?*

Ver. 9. "But I wrought for thy name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen among whom they were." "The missing object explaining what He did, namely, abstain from pouring out His wrath, is to be gathered from what follows: 'for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen.' This would have taken place if God had destroyed Israel by pouring out His wrath; in other words, have allowed them to be destroyed by the Egyptians. The heathen might then have said that Jehovah had been unable to liberate His people from their hand and power (Num. xiv. 16; Ex. xxxii. 12.")—(*Keil*). "Not only the miserable circumstances of their external condition, but still more the state of spiritual degradation into which the Hebrews had sunk, infinitely magnified the Divine mercy which interposed for their deliverance. 'Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.' The glory of this, as well as of the other attributes of Jehovah, was the ultimate end which

He had in view in bringing them forth from the house of bondage. This is described as His *name, i.e.*, the sum-total of His known perfections (Rom. ix. 17; 2 Sam. vii. 23; Isa. lxiii. 12). The preservation of that name from desecration is repeatedly spoken of this chapter (vers. 14, 22, 39).—*(Henderson.)*

HOMILETICS.

Israel's Election.

I. It was of God's free choice. "In the day when I chose Israel" (ver. 5). This choice had no reference to their merit or special fitness. They were selected to carry out the special purposes of redemption, because such was the will of God, who is not obliged to give any account to men of His matters. We must, however, avoid the error of attributing any caprice to God. He works not according to mere will, but "after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. i. 11).

II. It implied His willingness to be their God. "I am the Lord your God" (ver. 5). This includes all that the Creator can give to the creature—every blessing for time and eternity. Several stages were necessary for the realisation of this gift. 1. *God revealed Himself to them.* "And made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt." It is absolutely necessary that the soul should know Him whom it is to serve, and from whom it is to expect every blessing. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. xi. 6). But how can we come to God and have faith in Him unless He makes Himself known to us as an object worthy of our trust and reverence? We cannot know a *person* except he *speaks* and we cannot know God unless He reveals Himself in an intelligible voice. Therefore it is that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the *word* of God" (Rom. x. 17). 2. *God entered into covenant with them.* "And lifted up thine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob" (ver. 5). God's communication to His people was a covenant wherein He bound Himself to bless them, binding them at the same time to certain conditions. 3. *God engaged to lead them.* "To bring them forth of the land of Egypt" (ver. 6). He sought out and prepared for them a place of habitation, had espied for them a land flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands. Thus when God promises His people to be their God, this promise implies all that is meant by godliness and its reward—revelation, covenant blessings, discipline and guidance the peace and rest of the lot of the conquered inheritance.

III. It demanded corresponding duties. By every revelation of Himself, by every gift of God, man comes under obligation. It was the duty of Israel 1. *To forsake all false objects of worship* (ver. 7). But instead of this they defiled themselves with the idols of Egypt. 2. *To yield obedience to God's commands.* But instead of this, they rebelled against Him. God chooses men not for evil, but that He might redeem and save them. But they cannot be saved unless they are obedient to God's way of salvation. The children of Israel were disobedient. They did the very things which were contrary to the purpose for which they were elected. They were infected by the idolatry of Egypt. Though they were called out of the world to be a peculiar people, yet the influence of the world overcame them. They wished to stand well with Egypt, which was then the world-power.

IV. It heightened Israel's ingratitude. When they sinned against their high calling their sin was all the greater. 1. *The anger of God was provoked.* "I will pour out my fury upon them to accomplish my anger against them." The Egyptians were the instruments of this vengeance. It was, "in the midst of the land of Egypt" that God would accomplish His anger. They were punished by the very people whom they sought to propitiate. Thus God chastises men by those things in which they most delight. 2. *Even in the punishment of His people, God has regard to the honour of His name.* "But I wrought for my name's sake that it should not be polluted before the heathen among whom they were, in whose sight I made Myself known to them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt" (ver. 9). "But the revelation which I had given of Myself *before the eyes of the heathen among whom they were* was not to be desecrated before these same eyes, especially before the Egyptians, as if to wish well to My name were present with Me, but not the power of performance (regard being had at the same time to the heathen, as Israel was placed in a peculiar position in regard to humanity as a whole) Comp. Num. xiv. 13, etc.; Ex. xxxii. 12; Num. xxiii. 19."—(*Lange*).

(Ver. 6).

1. ***Old mercies should be remembered.*** Not only by those they were first bestowed upon, but also by their posterity. In this, and in the former verse, God reminds them of old mercies, His choice of them, His professing to be their God, His bringing them out of Egypt, which were some eight or nine hundred years before, and His espying out a land for them, which was four hundred years before that; for it was in Abraham's days that God took notice of that land (Gen. xii. 1, 7). These old mercies God would have them to mind, though they were in Babylon, and deprived of the good land God had given them. Let men be in what condition they will, old mercies should not be forgotten (Psa. xliv. 1, 2; Judg. vi. 13). And because men are apt to forget former mercies, when they grow old they grow out of mind, the Lord laid a charge upon the Jews that they should not forget them (Deut. vi. 10-12). 2. *Countries and habitations of people are appointed by the Lord.* He distributes lands and habitations to whom He thinks meet. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (Psa. xxiv. 1). He is the sole owner, the true Lord of the soil, and all it brings forth, and He hath "given it to the children of men" (Psa. cxv. 16). He hath assigned them their several portions (Deut. xxxii. 8). The most high God, being Lord paramount, would not have the sons of Adam to live all in one country, but appointed them several lands to dwell in, and set their bounds and limits. After the flood, at the building of Babel, God confounded the languages, and dispersed the posterity of Noah into divers lands, and set them their bounds (Gen. xi. 9). And so, when He brought the Israelites into the land of Canaan, He gave them their bounds (Psa. lxxviii. 55). 3. *The Lord provides and bestows the choicest mercies upon His own people.* If there be a land in the world that flows with milk and honey, that exceeds all other lands for plenty and pleasantness, His people shall have it. When God carried Jacob and his family into Egypt, He provided the good and fat of that land for them (Gen. xlv. 18); yea, they were placed in "the best of the land" (Gen. xlvii. 11). God fed and filled His people with "the finest of the wheat" (Psa. cxlvii. 14). Moses mentions seven things together in Deut. xxxii. 13–15, as "honey out of the rock, oil out of the flinty rock, butter of kine, milk of sheep, fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, fat of kidneys of wheat, the pure blood of the grape;" these the Lord provided for His people, and they had all an excellency in them. God bestowed choice mercies upon this people (Ezek. xvi. 10–13).

David acknowledges that he had a "goodly heritage," even a "wealthy place." Daniel and the three children were set in eminent places (Dan. ii.; iii.). 4. *Spiritual mercies make a land glorious.* Canaan was the glory of all lands, not so much for its great plenty as for the spiritual mercies it enjoyed. There was the Lord's presence, His prophets, His worship, His oracles, and His ordinances, and these made it glorious, yea, more than all the nations far or near. "In Judah is God known: His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling-place in Zion" (Psa. lxxvi. 1, 2). God was not known in Babylon, in Egypt, in other nations; His tabernacle and dwelling-place was not amongst them, therefore they were not glorious. "Thou art more glorious than the mountains of prey"; thou Judah, thou Israel, thou Salem, thou Zion, that hast spiritual mercies and blessings, art more glorious than they, whatever their glory be. Have the nations abroad goodly towers? thou hast the temple. Have they stately cities? thou hast Jerusalem, the city of God. Have they wise men? thou hast the prophets. Have they gods of gold, silver, and stones? thou hast the true living God, Jehovah, to be thy God. Have they human laws that are good? thou hast divine laws that excel. Have they temporal excellencies? thou hast spiritual. Have they the glory of the world? thou hast the glory of heaven. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined" (Psa. l. 1, 2). What made Zion so glorious and beautiful? It was the presence of God; if He had not been there, Zion had been like other mountains, and Canaan like other nations; but His presence was like the sun, darting out His beams, and making all glorious and beautiful. Spiritual mercies are beams and rays of that God who is brighter than the sun; by these He shined in Zion and made it the perfection of beauty. By these He shined out of Zion, and darkened all the glory of the nations. Where God and His ordinances are, there is glory; and where these are not, there is no glory, but Egyptian darkness—a land without the sun. In Canaan was spiritual light and glory. There were glorious appearances of God, glorious praisings of God, glorious conversions of sinners unto God, glorious sabbaths and assemblies, and glorious beauties of holiness, glorious types of Christ, and people who were the glory of God (Isa. iv. 5). There were glorious truths, ordinances, and dispensations of God. Plenty of outward things do not make a land glorious as spiritual mercies do. If God, Christ, Gospel, and the ordinances of it be in a land they make it glorious above all other nations. Let us learn to know our true glory, even spiritual mercies, and prize them highly, though loathed by some, like the manna of old, and pray that such glory may ever dwell in our land.—*(Greenhill.)*

(Ver. 9).

God's name is polluted. (1). When it is not hallowed. Not acknowledged, or esteemed to be holy and honourable. (2). When it is slighted, and not used reverently. God's name is great, glorious, excellent, holy, and ought to be reverenced (Psa. cxi. 9). (3). When occasion is given to the wicked to speak evil of God and His ways. David by his sins gave great occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme (2 Sam. xii. 14). The Jews by their sinful carriage caused the name of God to be profaned among the heathen. Had the Lord, then, destroyed this people in Egypt, according as He purposed, the Egyptians and other nations would have slighted Him, spoken evil of His doings, blasphemed His name, and wounded His honour. Therefore, though this people deserved to die in the way of justice, yet God spared them in the way of mercy for the honour of His name. "Before the heathen." The Hebrew is, "in the eyes of the heathen." God would not have them to see or behold anything which might

occasion them to dishonour Him. He would not slay His people in their sight, but made Himself known by His word and mighty works unto the Jews, in the sight of the heathen, so that hereby He was known unto both. **1.** *The Lord spares and saves sinners deserving death, even for His name's sake.* God's honour and glory are strong arguments to move Him to show mercy to His people. This the servants of God have known, and made use of, in their straits. When Jerusalem was in a manner laid desolate, and the jealousy of God burned like fire, what argument did the Church use then to move God to show mercy but His "name," and the glory of it? (Psa. lxxix. 9). What hurt would it be to God's name if He did it not? It would not be glorious, but dishonoured; for in the next verse it is said, "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God?" They trusted in their God, and He is a non-helping God, a non-delivering God. This was the argument Joshua used when Israel fell before their enemies, "Lord, what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?" When the people forgot the multitude of great mercies they had in Egypt, and provoked Him at the sea, even at the Red Sea, and deserved to be drowned in it, what saith the text? "Nevertheless, He saved them for His name's sake." (Psa. cvi. 8). **2.** *God's sparing of His people is an honouring and sanctifying of His name.* God deals with His people sometimes, not after the ordinary rule and course of His proceedings, but in a prerogative way; He spares them, though their sins be great, because their enemies would be proud, arrogant, and blasphemous. (Deut. xxxii. 26, 27.)

3. *That notwithstanding the sins of God's people, He shows them kindness openly, and in the face of their enemies.* Though the Jews had rebelled against God, and the Egyptians would have rejoiced in their ruin, yet, in their sight, God made Himself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt. God would have the Egyptians see that He could be kind to His people, though they were disobedient unto Him.—(*Greenhill.*)

(Vers. 10-17).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The sin of the first generation of Israelites in the wilderness: yet the Lord did not make an end of them.

Ver. 11. "**And I gave them My statutes, and showed them My judgments.**" This was a general expression for the law which was delivered to them. "God gave laws at Sinai to the people whom He had brought out of Egypt, through which they were sanctified as His own people, that they might live before God."—(*Keil.*) "**Which if a man do, he shall even live in them.**" He who obeyed God's laws would find them tend "unto life" (Rom. vii. 10; x. 5). The life which comes of obedience was not mere existence, but prosperity and blessedness, both bodily and spiritual, temporal and eternal (Deut. iv. 1; Matt. xix. 17; Ex. xx. 12, etc.). The leading through the wilderness served to test their obedience.

Ver. 12. "**I gave them my Sabbaths.**" "God concludes the directions for His worship by urging upon the people in the most solemn manner the observance of His Sabbaths, and thereby pronounces the keeping of the Sabbath as the kernel of all divine worship. And, as in that passage (Ex. xxxi. 13), we are to understand by the Sabbaths the actual weekly Sabbaths, and not the institutions of worship as a whole, so here we must retain the literal signification of the word. It is only of the Sabbaths occurring every week, and not of all the fasts, that it could be said that it was a sign between Jehovah and Israel. It was a sign, not as a token, that they who observed it were Israelites, but that they might know that Jehovah was

sanctifying them, namely, by the Sabbath rest—as a refreshing and elevation of the mind, in which Israel was to have a foretaste of that blessed resting from all works to which the people of God was ultimately to attain. It is from this deeper signification of the Sabbath that the prominence given to the Sabbaths here is to be explained, and not from the outward circumstance that in exile, when the sacrificial worship was necessarily suspended, the keeping of the Sabbath was the only bond which united the Israelites, so far as the worship of God was concerned."—(*Keil*). The weekly pause in the midst of earthly labour was a "sign" of the spiritual work which God was performing among His obedient people; a "sign" also that they were sanctified, were set apart from all other nations, as that day was from the rest of the week.

Ver. 13. **"They walked not in My statutes, and they despised My judgments."** Historical examples of Israel's rebellion against God's commandments in the wilderness are given in Ex. xxxii. 1–6; Num. xxv. 1–3; and of the desecration of the Sabbath in Ex. xvi. 27; Num. xv. 32. **"My Sabbaths they greatly polluted."** "History records nothing of an external violation of the Sabbath during the journey through the wilderness. Num. xv. 32, where the man who gathered wood on the Sabbath was brought before the congregation, and stoned by them after formal sentence, is rather a proof that in this respect they were not wanting in zeal. But the prophet, in accordance with Isa. lviii. 13, 14, and with Moses himself, who commanded to *sanctify* the Sabbath, to consecrate it in every respect to God, and withdraw it wholly from the region of self-interest, of personal sinful inclination, according to which the festival cannot possibly be observed with indolent repose, forms a deeper and more spiritual idea of the Sabbath. 'Thou shalt cease from thy doing, that God may have His work in thee,' in this sense the truly God-fearing only can celebrate the Sabbath; so that all that in the books of Moses attests the want of true godliness among the people in the wilderness, involves at the same time the charge of desecrating the Sabbath."—(*Hengstenberg*).

Ver. 14. **"But I wrought for My name's sake."** "For His name's sake God destroys not the people; but He excludes the present generation from the possession of Canaan, in just retribution for that which they have practised against Him. To this just retribution points the—'And I also' (ver. 15). It depends on the will of every one what position he will take towards God; but he must be prepared for this, that his act will be attended with a corresponding Divine act."—*(Hengstenberg.)*

Ver. 15. **"Yet, also, I lifted up My hand unto them in the wilderness."** The lifting up of God's hand signifies the Divine oath (Num. xiv. 28–30; Psa. cvi. 26).

Ver. 16. **"Their heart went after their idols."** The idolatries of the children of Israel during their wanderings in the desert are referred to by the prophet Amos, and in St. Stephen's speech (Amos v. 25, 26; Acts vii. 42, 43).

Ver. 17. **"Mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness."** Though the generation that sinned in the desert perished, yet God did not give the whole of the people over to the destruction which they deserved. The "hand" of righteous anger was lifted to smite, but the "eye" of gracious pity restrained it.

HOMILETICS.

The Sin of the first generation of the Children of Israel in the Wilderness (Vers. 10–17).

I. It was a sin aggravated in its character. 1. *They sinned after a great deliverance.* In Egypt they were persecuted and held in cruel bondage. They learned to worship the gods of the nation which ruled over them (Josh. xxiv. 14). But they were brought out of that land by the manifest power of God, and were thus delivered both from bodily and spiritual slavery. 2. *They sinned after special means had been used to preserve their spiritual character as the elect of God.* (1). *They had a clear revelation of God's law.* God had given them His "statutes," and showed them His "judgments." The observance of these would have been their peace, happiness, and salvation. (Ver. 11.) For the law of God tends to "life" (Rom. vii. 20.) It is true that the law would give the knowledge of sin (Rom. iii. 20), yet that knowledge ought to have brought them to confess their sins and to seek forgiveness through the blood of the atonement. They had to render obedience not to a blind power, making in some way for righteousness, but to a living will,—to the one true God who was merciful and desired their salvation. (2.) *They were placed in circumstances favourable to the spiritual life.* God had brought them out from the bondage and seductive civilization of Egypt and had led them into the wilderness (ver. 10). The seclusion of the desert was favourable to contemplation,—to seriousness of character. They would have a time to reflect upon God's loving kindness in redemption. Obedience would have given them the means of making a great history (Ex. xix. 3-9). Placed in such outward conditions as would naturally have the effect of leading them to cast themselves upon God's care and governance, and delivered from the corrupting influences of the world, they had the most favourable opportunity for becoming a spiritual people. (3.) *They had the ordinance of the Sabbath.* The Sabbath was given to them as a "sign" and to promote the holiness of the nation (ver. 12). For this intermission of earthly work was a pledge of that work which God was carrying on amongst His obedient people (Ex. xxxi. 13). It was a sign that God sanctified the people, that He separated them from the rest of the world, and that He would bring them, at last, to their quiet inheritance of rest. To keep the Sabbath with due regard to its spiritual significance was truly to fear and to serve God. But they rebelled against God in the wilderness, they polluted His Sabbaths (ver. 13). In the pollution of the Sabbath there was a special danger to their religious life. For if that sacred day was not piously observed, it only exposed them the more to strong temptation. If it was not occupied with thoughts of God, it laid their souls open to the incursions of every evil thought. Some of the early Christian writers charge the Jews of their time with spending their Sabbaths in licentiousness. Thus Israel had superior religious advantages in the wilderness, but idolatry was in the heart of the people. The corruptions of Egypt clung to them (ver. 16).

II. It was a sin which was visited with a fitting punishment. A punishment, not only in *degree*, but also in *kind*. They polluted God's Sabbaths, and He would not bring them to the land of rest. His plan concerning them was to lead them to the land of their inheritance, where they might dwell in peace and safety. But all revolt from God must be followed by darkness and disorder, by a disarrangement of all those good things which He has prepared for us.

III. Their sin did not altogether shut out God's mercy. They were not all destroyed in the wilderness as they deserved. God has an "eye" of pity which arrests His "hand" of righteous anger.

(Vers. 15-17).

Here a difficulty ariseth. In ver. 6 it is said that God had lifted up His hand, and so sworn to bring them out of the land of Egypt into the land of Canaan; and here it is said He hath lifted up His hand to the contrary. It seems that here is one oath against another. And in Num. xiv. 34, God acknowledges His breach of promise, for He saith, "Ye shall know my breach of promise." I have promised and sworn to bring you into the land of Canaan, but you have so sinned against and provoked Me that I will not do it, yea, have sworn you shall not enter into my rest (Psa. xcv. 11). This difficulty is removed by considering that God did not make His promise or swear to those individual men that were kept out of Canaan, that they should be brought into it, for if it had been so God had forsworn Himself; but His promise and oath was that the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should be brought into it (Gen. xii. 17; xiii. 15; xv. 18; xxiv. 4; l. 24; Deut. xxxiv. 4); and their seed was brought into the promised land (Josh. i. 2; iv. 1; xiv. 1; xxiv. 13); and so God's promise and oath were kept. Those He swore against were those that murmured against Him, even all from twenty years old and upwards, except Caleb and Joshua, whose carcases fell in the wilderness (Josh. v. 6). As for Num. xiv. 34, God's breach of promise is, in the original, *by frustration:* you looked certainly to have entered into Canaan, but for your murmuring and unbelief I have *frustrated* your expectations. Or thus, you think My oath cannot be true, because of a former oath, and that the words I have uttered will prove false; but you shall know whether my words and oath be false or not. [The Revised Version (1885) has, "And ye shall know my alienation," with the rendering in the margin. "*The revoking of my promise.*"]

"Flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands." Of these words hath been spoken largely in ver. 6. They are repeated here to show the ingratitude of the people, that were not affected with this land, which was a second Paradise, but despised it, and raised an ill-report upon it; as also to show what they lost in being kept out of it, and their folly in preferring Egypt before it.

1. *Men's sins disappoint them of choice mercies.* Yea, mercies promised, expected, and near at hand. God had promised them Canaan, they were near unto it (Num. xiii.), expected to go in and possess it; but God would not bring them into the land because they despised His judgments, walked not in His statutes, but polluted His sabbaths.

In Heb. ii. 19, it is said, "They could not enter in because of unbelief;" and Psa. cvi. 24, "they despised the pleasant land, they believed not His word." It was their sins kept them back from so great, so near, so longed-for a mercy. Such is the malignity of sin that it drives mercies back when they are at the door, and blocks up the passage, that none for the future may issue forth towards us. God can hear and help; "but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (Isa. lix. 1, 2); your sins stand like a trap-wall, a mighty mountain, between Him and you; they have cramped His will, so that though He can, yet He will neither hear your prayers nor help your persons. It is sin that keeps mercy from us. (Jer. v. 25).

2. *When the heart is carried out after unlawful things, then the ways and ordinances of God are neglected, slighted, and profaned* (ver. 16). Their idols had stolen away their hearts from God. They had whorish hearts, and whorish eyes which went after their idols, and made them depart from God. David advised men not to set their hearts upon riches (Psa. lxii. 10); they will then be their idols, and make them forget God and His ways, and do those things

which will profane His ordinances. Look well to your hearts, and let not them carry you away (Job xv. 12).

3. *When sinners provoke God into ways of destruction, He doth not utterly destroy them, but shows some pity and mercy.* "Nevertheless mine eye spared them from destroying." God did destroy many of them in the wilderness; three thousand upon their making the calf (Ex. xxxii. 28); twenty-four thousand upon their committing whoredom with the daughters of Moab (Num. xxv. 9); much people by fiery serpents upon their murmuring (Num. xxi. 6); Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed up of the earth, and all theirs, and the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense were consumed by fire (Num. xvi. 32–35); fourteen thousand seven hundred were destroyed by the plague (ver. 49); and many by the Amorites in Seir (Deut. i. 44). Yet all were not destroyed; God did not make an end of them in the wilderness, He did not consummate and perfect His wrath upon them. Though men have sinned much, yet God hath an eye to spare and a heart to pity. If He should punish and destroy none, He would be thought to be like unto sinners (Psa. l. 21); if He should destroy all, He would be thought to be cruel; to show, therefore, that He is a just God, He cuts off some; and to show He is a merciful God, he spares some.—*(Greenhill.)*

Ver. 18–26.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The prophet describes the sins of the generation that grew up in the desert.

Ver. 18. "**But I said unto their children.**" The second generation of the children of Israel in the wilderness. "To the '*children*' belongs, among other things, the whole second law-giving, with its impressive admonitions, as it was promulgated in Arboth-Moab, and is recorded in Deuteronomy" (*Hengstenberg*). "**Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers.**" "The '*fathers*' in question are represented in their constant disobedience to the laws which Jehovah gave (which even necessitated their repetition and renewal in Deuteronomy), as in some sort law-givers according to their own ideas and on their own authority."—*(Lange.)*

Ver. 21. "**Notwithstanding the children rebelled against Me.**" "The sons acted like their fathers in the wilderness. Historical proofs of this are furnished by the accounts of the Sabbath-breaker (Num. xv. 32, etc.), of the rebellion of the company of Korah, and of the murmuring of the whole congregation against Moses and Aaron after the destruction of Korah's company (Num. xvi. and xvii.). In the last two cases God threatened that He would destroy the whole congregation (Num. xvi. 21; xvii. 9, 10), and on both occasions the Lord drew ba His hand at the intercession of Moses, and his actual intervention (Num. xvi. 22; xvii. 11), and did not destroy the whole nation for His name's sake. The statements in vers. 21, 22 rest upon these facts" *(Keil.)* God's justice was slow to punish; for from the murmuring at Kadesh (B.C. 1453) to the date of this chapter (B.C. 593) was 860 years; being two cycles of 430 years.

Ver. 23. "**Scatter them among the heathen.**" Dispersion among the heathen is threatened to apostate Israel (Lev. xxvi. 33; Deut. xxviii. 64). Nearly nine centuries had elapsed before this penalty was actually inflicted.

Ver. 24. "**Their father's idols.**" They had been warned against these (ver. 18). The vain traditions of their fathers had more authority with them than God's own word (1 Pet. i. 18.)

Ver. 25. "**Wherefore I gave them**

also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live." This was a second retribution. We may compare here Rom. i. 24, according to which God, in just retribution for their revolt, gave over the heathen to vile affections; Acts vii. 42, where it is traced back to God, that the heathen served the host of heaven; and 2 Thess. ii. 11, where God sends the apostates strong delusions. Grotius writes: "I have taken from them the understanding, that in despising my laws they may make for themselves hard and death-bearing laws." (*Hengstenberg.*) "Various attempts have been made to get rid of the apparent incongruity of the language here employed by the Divine Being. Taken absolutely it would be flatly contradictory of the purity and rectitude of His character, as well as that of the laws which He actually gave to the Israelites (Deut. iv. 8; Neh. ix. 13; Rom. vii. 12). The solution of the difficulty proposed by Manesseh Ben Israel, that the words should be read interrogatively, is altogether unsupported by the structure of the sentence, and is otherwise not borne out by Hebrew usage. I agree with those interpreters who are of opinion that the reference is to the idolatrous enactments of the heathen, and that the language may be best illustrated by comparison with Ps. lxxxi. 12; Hos. viii. 11; Acts vii. 42; Rom. i. 24; 2 Thess. ii. 11. Because the Hebrews cherished a propensity to indulge in idolatrous practices, God in His holy providence brought them into circumstances in which this propensity might be fully gratified, without His in any way imposing upon them the statutes of the Pagan ritual. On the contrary, He did all that was calculated in the way of moral influence to deter them from idolatry. Preferring, however, the rites and ceremonies of the heathen to His holy and righteous ordinances, they experienced not only that they were not good, but, as the language by meiosis imports, that they were most pernicious."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 26. "And I polluted them in their own gifts." "The language of this verse is quite in accordance with that of the preceding. The Holy One did not actually pollute the people; He only permitted them to pollute themselves, and pronounced them polluted when they had rendered themselves such. In the language of the Hebrews, and of the Orientials in general, God is frequently said to do that which He permits to be done."—(*Henderson.*) "They caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb." They followed the custom of the Canaanites in sacrificing their children to Moloch, in whose fiery arms they were destroyed. This was an awful perversion of God's law which bade them consecrate their firstborn to Him as "living sacrifices" (Ex. xiii. 2), so that the whole nation might thereby be hallowed. They preferred to serve an imaginary malignant deity, whose commands were unnatural and cruel, to the one true God who gave them a righteous law. This was a sin which brought its own punishment in doing violence to the most sacred feelings of human nature. The repeated prohibition against offering children through the fire to Moloch is an evidence that this custom made its way among the Israelites (Lev. xviii. 21; Deut. xviii. 10). "To the end that they might know that I am the Lord." "By which they might learn that their paternal God, whom they set at nought, is God in the full sense, whom to forsake is at once to fall into misery."—(*Hengstenberg.*)

HOMILETICS.

The Sin of the Second Generation of the Children of Israel in the Wilderness. (Vers. 18–26.)

I. They sinned after many warning examples. Their fathers had forsaken God's ordinances and turned to their idols. The children are warned against

their evil example (ver. 18); yet though they saw the sad effects of transgression against God, they sinned after the same manner. They rebelled at Kadesh (Num. xx. 2); by the Gulf of Akaba (Num. xxi. 5); and at Shittim, (Num. xxv. 2, 3). They had seen by sad experiment how rebellion against God must end, and yet they persisted in eating the grapes which had already set their father's teeth on edge. They disregarded the lessons of history. Thus there was less excuse for them than for the first generation.

II. They sinned after renewed precepts. 1. *Their relation to God was restated.* "I am the Lord your God" (ver. 19). 2. *Obedience was again commanded.* They were ordered to walk in God's statutes, to keep His judgments, and to observe the ordinance of the Sabbaths (ver. 19).

III. Their punishment. They were to be scattered among the heathen, and dispersed through the countries (ver. 23). A retributive providence was at work to bring this terrible infliction upon them. 1. *God abandoned them to their own devices.* "Wherefore I gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live" (ver. 25). These were the statutes of their fathers (ver. 18). The meaning is, that God withdrew His providential restraint and permitted them to have what they were bent upon (Psa. lxxi. 12; Acts vii. 42; Rom. i. 24). The parable of the prodigal son teaches us, that if a man thinks he can better himself elsewhere, God allows him to make the choice. It is a sad evil when the sinner is left to his own devices, when he casts off the authority of God and becomes his own master; "Lord of himself, that heritage of woe." 2. *God allowed their inward corruption to show itself.* "And I polluted them in their own gifts" (ver. 26). They felt that they must offer gifts to some invisible Power of which they were afraid. For they were conscious of impurity within; they felt the burden of sin, but they sought relief in will-worship until they became the victims of that awful infatuation which led them to offer up the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul (Mic. vi. 16). It is the saddest punishment when a man's inward corruption is allowed to spread and grow unchecked. 3. *Yet there was mercy in their punishment:*—1.—*It was long delayed.* In order that they might have space for repentance. They had been threatened long before with dispersion among the heathen (Lev. xxvi. 33), but nearly nine centuries had elapsed before that sentence was actually inflicted. 2.—*It was for a gracious end.* "To the end that they might know that I am the Lord" (ver. 26). In the worst punishments of sinners God has a gracious end in view. Mercy, at length, rejoices over judgment.

IV. The lessons to be derived from their sin and punishment. 1. *That the standard to which we ought to conform our lives should be the Word of God.* This second generation of Israel in the wilderness forsook the direct commands of God and followed the vain traditions of their fathers. They received for doctrines the commandments of men. The truly righteous man looks to his God alone, and is governed not by human opinion, or by ancient custom, but by the revealed Word (Psa. cxix. 105). 2. *That even Godlessness may become a law unto men.* They had "statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live" (ver. 25). Thus the world and the devil have also their statutes and ordinances. 3. *That God punishes men through the very instruments of their sin.* They had copied the heathen around them, had followed man's doctrine, and it had brought them no rest or peace, nothing but sorrow and death. 4. *That even the very errors of the heathen show man's need of a religion.* The fact that Israel sacrificed their children to a malignant deity shows that they felt the burden of sin and the need of forgiveness. 5. *That the true reform of the Church of God must begin with youth.* The law of God

as to His statutes and ordinances was repeated unto "their children in the wilderness" (ver. 18). When the Church is greatly polluted the only hope lies in the careful instruction of the younger generation.

(Verses 27–29).

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — Israel continued to commit these sins in Canaan also, and still refuses to give them up.

Ver. 27. "Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me, in that they have committed a trespass against Me." The prophet is addressing the people of his own time, and boldly charges them with committing the same sins as their fathers in the land of Canaan. The sin of the children of Israel in Canaan took a worse form than their sin in the wilderness. It was a more open affront to God, for they deliberately "blasphemed" His name. They rejected Him contemptuously when they left that one place which He selected "to put his name there," and chose places of their own, offering sacrifice "on every high hill." They did dishonour to the Holy Place."

Ver. 28. "They saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering: there also they made their sweet savour, and poured out there their drink offerings." The stricter designation of blasphemy follows in this verse, after it was designated in general at the close of ver. 27. "The provocation of their offering" the offerings to idols, whereby they provoked the anger of God; *comp.* Deut. xxxii. 16, 17, "They provoked Him to jealousy with strange (gods); with abominations they made Him indignant. They sacrificed to lords which were not God, to gods whom they knew not." God says to them in the tone of reproach (1 Kings ix. 13), "What is the high place whereunto ye go?" (ver. 29): How can ye, instead of seeking Me in My true sanctuary, turn to these miserable places, with their miserable gods? And yet these are named high places unto this day, in the sense of sanctuaries, and with the notion that they have something peculiar about them."—*Hengstenberg.* The repetition of the word "*there*" three times seems to be an echo of Deut. xii. 5-7, "Unto His habitation . . . . thither . . . . thither . . . . "there" (ver. 40).

Ver. 29. "And the name thereof is called Bamah unto this day." "Bamah," a Hebrew word, signifying *High-Place.* The tops of high hills were used by the heathen for idolatrous worship; and, in consequence, Moses interdicted the use of them even for the worship of the true God (Deut. xii. 1-5).

HOMILETICS.

(Vers. 27–29.)

I. The nature of the sin of blasphemy. "Your fathers have blasphemed Me" (ver. 27). This was the "trespass" which they committed against Jehovah. The essence of blasphemy consists in contempt of God; in deliberately disobeying His commands, especially as to worship. For surely God has the absolute right to lay down the manner in which He shall be approached, served, and adored. He appointed the Holy Place for His worship, but Israel

served their own Gods in places of their own appointing. When once God has spoken clearly, all mere will-worship is of the nature of blasphemy.

II. Blasphemy is ever the sin of the unregenerate heart. We speak especially of those who have the advantages of a Divine revelation, and who have means therefore for knowing the mind and will of God. Those who have no means of knowing God cannot consciously blaspheme Him 1. *The unregenerate heart may recognise the idea of God, and the duty of worship.* The Israelites of the prophet's time felt that they must worship some divinity. They must have a religion. But 2. *The unregenerate heart, though it pretends to a religion, leaves out the true essentials of it.* And what are these? A recognition of God's supreme authority as a righteous Ruler, a Saviour from sin, and a Sanctifier. Such men are ready to "recognize the idea of God," but under the pretence of a lofty philosophical religion they practically deny God's authority, they destroy the foundations of all truth in belief and worship. Sinful man, even when he holds by some prime necessity of religion, is ever prone to exalt his own mind and will. 3. *The unregenerate heart has a natural preference for a burdensome and difficult religion.* Israel was not satisfied with worshipping God in His holy temple, but preferred travelling great distances and climbing the high hills. Man is ever ready to "do some great thing." God's way is too simple for him. There is something in human nature which is flattered by difficult demands.

III. The sin of blasphemy especially interferes with God's gracious purposes for mankind. God chose His ancient people that through them all the families of the earth should be blessed. Salvation is of the Jews. Israel was becoming like the heathen, whereas it was God's purpose that the heathen should become like Israel. Thus by their idolatry, and even blasphemy, the chosen people were working against the gracious purposes of the Most High. All manner of blasphemy against God, whether arising from intellectual pride, or superstition, or will-worship hinders the progress of His kingdom.

(Ver. 27).

"Have blasphemed Me." The Hebrew word signifies, to revile with words, to reproach, and blaspheme. To blaspheme is to hurt the name or fame of any, and is a kind of evil speaking, derogating from the glory of God. God's glory or name in itself is inviolable, but blasphemy doth what it can to violate it. Blasphemy consists—1. *In attributing to God what is not congruous to Him.* As to say, He is the author of sin; He sees not, He hath forsaken the earth (Ezek. viii. 12); He is like unto man (Psa. l. 21). 2. *In detracting from Him what belongs unto Him.* As to deny His providence, His omniscience, His omnipotence, as, "can He provide a table in the wilderness?" (Psa. lxxviii. 19); If He should make windows in heaven could this thing be? (2 Kings vii. 2). 3. *The doing of such things as cause God's name to be blasphemed.* As, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." As there is practical atheism, so there is practical blasphemy (Tit. i. 16). "In that they have committed a trespass against Me." The doubling of the word in the Hebrew notes the greatness of their sin, and progress in their wickedness. They sinned not ignorantly, or of common infirmity, but with a high hand. They spake against the true worship of God, and practised contrary thereunto. *Wilful sinning is a reproaching of God, and provokes Him greatly.* "They have committed a trespass against Me." They have spoken against My worship, and run out to other ways which I forbade them. Other sins they have committed which I could have winked at, but when they sin wilfully, despising Me, My

laws, My worship, they reproach, blaspheme, provoke Me so, that they shall hear of it. Son of man, go and speak to the house of Israel; go and tell them how they have dealt with Me, and how I take it. Such sins deserve death (Num. xv. 30). "The soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord." The Hebrew word here rendered "reproacheth" is the same as that rendered "blasphemed" in Ez. xx. 27. For he that reproacheth the Lord blasphemes Him, and he that blasphemes Him reproacheth Him: they are joined together (2 Kings xix. 22). There was no mercy for those who sinned in that manner (Heb. x. 26, 27). Many commit such trespasses in these days, by speaking against providence, ordinances, Scriptures, angels, Christ, God himself; and so sin away mercy and their own souls at once. David prayed that God would keep him back from "presumptuous sins" (Psa. xix. 13); and we have need to do it, for there is that in our natures which carries us on strongly towards them. Solomon saith, "Happy is the man that feareth always; but he that hardeneth his heart"—that presumeth, that is wilful, pertinacious—"shall fall into mischief," into mischievous sins, into mischievous judgments.—(*Greenhill*).

(Verses 30-38.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The prophet addresses the men of his day, showing that they are equally guilty with their fathers. They are to receive just retribution, and to be purified among the heathen.

Ver. 30. **"Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom, after their abominations?** These interrogations are intended to imply a strong affirmative.

Ver. 31. **"Even unto this day."** "The note struck in the question of Ver. 29 is still maintained, not merely to express astonishment, but still more to compel self-reflection. I ask, what further communication you would have?"—(*Lange.*)

Ver. 32. **"We will be as the heathen."** They flattered themselves that the heavy judgments which the prophets had threatened would not be inflicted; that they could accept without molestation the state of the heathen, and the responsibility of the heathen. **"That which cometh into your mind shall not be at all."** That wish is declared to be impossible, for they stood before God on a different foundation from the heathen around them. "Here we have the announcement of their continued punishment. The heathen stood under the divine long-suffering (Rom. iii. 25); not so Israel, to whom God had so gloriously made Himself known. Wherein the heathen may prosper, therein Israel must decline. The designation of the heathen gods as wood and stone, alone sufficient to counteract the strange notion which attributed a real existence to the heathen gods, is taken from Deut. iv. 28; xxviii. 36."—(*Hengstenberg.*)

Ver. 33. **Surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched-out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you."** "Their thought was, that they should become like the heathen in the lands of the earth, to serve wood and stone; that is to say, we will become idolators like the heathen, pass into heathenism. This shall not take place; on the contrary, God will rule over them as King with strong arm and fury. The words, "with a mighty hand, and with a stretched-out arm," are a standing expression in the Pentateuch for the mighty acts by which Jehovah liberated His people from the power of the Egyptians, and led them out of Egypt (Ex. vi. 1, 6; Deut. iv. 34, v. 15, vii. 19, etc.). By the intro-

duction of the clause, "with fury poured out," the manifestation of the omnipotence of God which Israel experienced in its dispersion, and which it was still to experience among the heathen, is described as an emanation of the divine wrath, a severe and wrathful judgment.—(*Keil*). "For the friendly and gracious government of God they have given Him little thanks, and have wickedly withdrawn from Him. As God, however, must come to His sovereign rights, so His sovereignty now assumes a terrible form."—(*Hengstenberg.*)

Ver. 34. **"And will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered."** "Although Keil explains the 'leading out' as neither local nor material, yet we do not understand it with him of a spiritual separation from the heathen world (to which they are immediately brought, ver. 35), 'lest they should be absorbed in it,' etc., but of an aggravation of their exiled condition, a spiritual experience of it, so that they should know and feel that they as the people of God were once more in the wilderness, but not at all in the same sense as before (Deut. viii. 15, xxxii. 10)."—(*Lange.*)

Ver. 35. **"The wilderness of the people."** In ancient time, Israel had been trained and disciplined in the literal wilderness (Deut. viii. 15, 16); now God was about to send them to a new school of affliction, among the busy, populous world. There they would be made to feel their isolation severely. "The wilderness is designated as 'the wilderness of the peoples', in contradistinction to the former wilderness, where was only the howling of wild beasts (Deut. xxxii. 10), lions, serpents, and the like (Deut. viii. 15; Isa. xxx. 6). The new wilderness is one in which Israel is in the midst of the peoples, and can therefore be no ordinary wilderness, for wilderness and peoples exclude one another. It must rather be a symbolic or typical designation of the state of punishment and purification. The interchange of type and thing is in verse 36 separated. From the defect of historical notices concerning the state of the exiles, we cannot show the fulfilment of this prophetic announcement. It is natural, however, to suppose that the part taken by the exiles in the political intrigues of the home country brought upon them also severe sufferings."—(*Hengstenberg.*) **"There will I plead with you face to face."** "Jehovah threatens to deal with them as in open court by clearing those who had repented of their wickedness, and punishing the obstinate as He had done their fathers of old."—(*Henderson*).

Ver. 36. **"Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt."** "They were not led into the wilderness of the peoples as a punishment; although on account of their disobedience it often became a place of punishment; but the divine intention was to try them, to prove them (Deut. viii. 2, etc.), from which resulted separation of individuals, purification, which was so strongly urged upon them in reference to Egypt, whither they were always looking back (Num. xx. 5; xxi. 5)."—(*Lange*).

Ver. 37. **"And I will cause you to pass under the rod."** The reference is to the rod of a shepherd counting his sheep (Lev. xxvii. 32). "A shepherd lets his sheep pass through under the rod for the purpose of counting them, and seeing whether they are in good condition or not (Jer. xxxiii. 13). The figure is here applied to God. Like a shepherd, He will cause His flock, the Israelites, to pass through under His rod, *i.e.*, to take them into His special care."—(*Keil.*) **"And I will bring you into the bond of the covenant."** "By this we are not merely to understand covenant punishments, but the covenant promises must also be included. For not only the threats of the covenant, but also its promises, are *bonds* by which God trains His people. The Hebrew word is not only

applied to burdensome and crushing fetters, but to the bonds of love as well (Cant. vii. 16)."—(*Keil.*) The "bonds" of God's covenant are those of love (Hos. xi. 4).

Ver. 38. "The rebels." Those who would not have the Lord for their king (St. Luke xix. 14, 27). "I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel." Canaan was called "the land of their pilgrimage" (Ex. vi. 4). They had debased the land which God gave them to dwell in by their idolatries, and so it became to them the land of bondage. Therefore God would bring them out of it, and send them to wander in the world's wilderness. Through unfaithfulness they were unable to enter "into God's rest" (Ps. xcv. 11), that rest which remaineth only for those whose God is the Lord (Heb. iv. 9). "The language here implies that the great body of the nation should be recovered from idolatry, and return to their native land, and that only a portion would continue in a state of rebellion against Jehovah, and consequently remain in exile" (*Henderson.*) "And ye shall know that I am the Lord." "This is the painful experience that will sooner or later force itself upon all those who despise salvation."—(*Hengstenberg.*)

HOMILETICS.

(Vers. 30–32.)

God hiding Himself from Israel professing to seek Him.

The Elders professed that they had come "to inquire of the Lord." But they came insincerely. That High-place still remained as a witness to their idolatries (ver. 29). In spite of the reformations under Hezekiah and Josiah, and the frequent warnings of the prophets, they worshipped false gods even in front of the Lord's Temple (1 Kings xi. 7). Hence God's final refusal, through His prophet, "I will not be enquired of by you" (ver. 31). Why did God hide Himself from His people, who, through these Elders, were professing to seek Him?

I. **Because of their continuance in the sin of idolatry.** They were polluted after the manner of their fathers (Vers. 30, 31). God encourages all who seek the truth in sincerity, even though it be through ignorance and superstition. But when the truth we seek is a delusion, which we wilfully follow—a mere idol, God hides His face from us. 1. *Idolatry obscures man's natural knowledge of God.* It leads the religious instinct astray, and into all that is debasing and vile. Though it may call in the aid of beauty and refinement, yet it has ever a degrading and downward tendency. 2. *Idolatry in the chosen people was the rankest transgression.* They were God's people by vocation, by covenant, by special providence. This sin was, therefore, the worst that Israel could possibly commit. And it shewed further,—(1.) *The power of bad example.* The corrupting influences of the idolatries around them. (2.) *The perils of all pomp and glaring externals in religion.* They were attracted by the outward and the sensual, which were the characteristics of heathen worship.

II. **Because of the impossibility of their becoming in all respects like the heathen.** They might imitate their customs, worship their idols, and sink down into their degraded condition; yet they could not be made to stand on the same footing before God. 1. *They could not get rid of their responsibility.* God had made Himself known unto them by revelation. Therefore they

could not be *judged* as the heathen, but by a different standard. Men will be judged by the highest standard revealed to them, and not by the lowest, which they have chosen in their sin and folly. 2. *God's long-suffering towards the heathen did not apply to Israel.* The patience which God showed towards the heathen could not be expected towards those who had higher religious advantages. 3. *It is impossible so to obliterate the past as though it had never been.* The memory of the past makes our whole life one. We cannot part from our former selves. However Israel might have sunk into idolatry, the fact of their glorious privileges in the past still remained. None of those who dwell in a land visited by the light of God's Revelation can become, in all respects, like the heathen. We may choose the sins of heathenism, but we must be judged as those who have had opportunity for the knowledge of God.

(Vers. 37, 38).

1. *The Lord doth distinguish His people from others.* "I will cause you to pass under the rod." I will examine which are sheep, and which are goats, and will sever the one from the other. Christ knew His sheep, His little flock, from all the goats of the mountains. When the men appeared with weapons of slaughter in their hands, and execution was to be upon Jerusalem, the Lord made His people to "pass under the rod." He numbered them, and set His mark upon them, that they might not perish in the common calamity (Ezek. ix). 2. *Though God's people do go out from Him, and violate the covenant, yet He will not let them so go, but will bring them under His power.* These had transgressed the covenant, broken the bonds, cast off the ways of God, thought to exempt themselves from His rule over them, but, saith the Lord, "I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;" you shall be under my power and law. Though I suffer Babylonians and other nations to be at their own disposal, yet it shall not be so with you who are my people with whom I am in covenant, and to whom I must be faithful whatever you are to me, and will be known to be your God and Sovereign. I will have account of you, and make you know that you are under my bonds, and not Babylonish ones. 3. *God's dealings with His people is very different.* He brings them "into the bonds of the covenant," to see what they are; if they be goats, wicked, He punishes them and purges them out; if they be sheep, though they have gone astray, He pardons them and enables them to yield to covenant obedience. He purged out the wicked by judgments and death, and preserved the others. The righteous were jewels, and therefore spared; the wicked were stubble, and therefore destroyed. 4. *Though the wicked be among the godly yet they shall not always be so.* "I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me." It is God's method, even here in this world, ofttimes to separate the wicked from the godly, to fan out the chaff from the wheat. 5. *Whatever man's thoughts are of the world, they are but sojourners therein.* "I will bring them out of the land of their sojournings," were it Canaan or Babylon, they were no more than "sojourners." Wicked men think they are heirs to, owners and lords of the earth (Psa. xlix. 11). David, though king in Israel, yet acknowledgeth himself a sojourner, as all his fathers were. They spent a few days therein, and so passed away, and this was his condition. Let us look so upon ourselves, and "pass the time of our sojourning here in fear" (1 Pet. i. 17); and mind that city which hath foundations, out of which, if we be once possessed, we shall never be removed. 6. *When God brings His people into Canaan, He will shut out the wicked, they shall not enter into the land of Israel.* Others shall be brought in, but as for those who would be as the world, as the heathen, as Babylonians, they shall never come into Canaan.

Canaan was the type of heaven, and this exclusion of these wicked ones, represents the exclusion of ungodly ones out of heaven. However, good and bad are mingled together in this world, and oft in the church, yet when God brings His people to the heavenly Canaan, no unclean thing shall enter there (Rev. xxi. 7; 1 Cor. vi. 9). 7. *Mercies and judgments make God known experimentally.* "Ye shall know that I am the Lord." God would purge out the rebels from the obedient; there was mercy. Keep them out of the land of Israel; there was judgment. The rebels should know and acknowledge Him to be Jehovah, being convinced with the equity of His judgments, and affected with the severity of them. The godly should do it, being convinced and affected with the nature, greatness, needfulness, and freeness of that mercy. Judgment upon these rebels was mercy to the godly; and mercy to the godly was mercy to the rebels; and both were brought to acknowledge the Lord. Mercies and judgments work most affectionately and effectually upon the godly; for it is said, "Ye shall know," ye that are purged, ye that shall come to the land of Israel.—*(Greenhill.)*

(Ver. 35).

"And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face." The history of the Jews is a surprising but most instructive history. These men have been the moral benefactors of the world by what they have said, by what they have done, by what they have suffered. Men have been blessed in them, and all generations have reason to call them blessed. In their prosperity they were the lights of the world; in their adversity they have been the instructors of it also.

The situation of Judea was remarkably adapted to the moral purposes God had in view. Placed in the centre of those great continents of the ancient world, at the head of the Mediterranean, and surrounded by those empires and dynasties which contended for the sovereignty of the East, they were happily so situated as to convey the light of truth in different directions. They were in the direct line of intercourse between the Assyrians and Egyptians, and a prominent object of attention to the Grecians and Romans. It was a place of great resort though little engaged in commerce. Frequent embassies were exchanged by the Jewish government and foreign nations, which rendered their laws and customs, and, above all, their Scriptures known.

But, strange to say, in their adversity they have been quite as useful as in their prosperity. In prosperity they held the lamp of truth to the view of the nations; in adversity they carried it wheresoever they wandered; a striking proof that if we will not voluntarily honour God in our enjoyments, He can make us honour Him in our distresses. In their very *captivities* they were made a blessing. They were scattered for their own sins, but God brought a revenue of glory to Himself and a harvest of blessing to the world from that very event. God brought them, as the text says, into the *wilderness of the nations.* They were scattered into all lands,—many of them never returned, and the ten tribes still are mixed with the nations.

The subject arising from the text is, *The mixed character of Divine dispensations.* Not all judgment, lest we despair; nor all mercy, lest we presume. Affliction is here traced in its *causes, design, consolations.*

I. The causes of affliction. These are to be traced to human sinfulness. Israel's sorrows are here traced to Israel's sins. Though the righteous and wicked are both involved in the same calamities, yet God has different ends in the same dispensation. That which hardens the one, softens and sanctifies the

other. The two chief sins of the Jews were—1. *The abuse of mercies* (vers. 5–26; Hosea ii. 8). Teaching that sins under or after peculiar mercies are greatly offensive to God. Jesus said, "Go thy way, sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee." It is a remark respecting Solomon's idolatries that he fell into them "after the Lord had appeared unto him twice." The aggravations of David's sin (2 Sam. xiii. 7). Sins under or after special mercies will meet with a severe rebuke. Nothing more distresses the conscience than the remembrance, in darkness, of abused light; in desertions, of neglected love. Great opportunities of service neglected, and great gifts unimproved, involve guilt. 2. *The abuse of trials.* This involves guilt, and calls down heavier afflictions. This constitutes the peculiar instruction of their history. They were now in captivity. The elders of Israel came to Ezekiel in the most hypocritical manner. They proposed to consult God about their joining the people of the country, abandoning their religious peculiarities, and conforming to the customs of the heathen. God would not be consulted, but instructs Ezekiel to detect and expose their hypocrisy. It seems they had not openly expressed the sentiment, but it was "in their mind" to say, "we will be as the heathen to serve wood and stone." This calls down the threatening of the text (vers. 32–35). Religion is the best armour, but not the best cloak.

Guard against taking occasion from your afflictions of plunging into greater guilt. Many fail to improve their afflictions, but it is awful indeed to be the worse for them like Ahaz, who, in his distress, sinned yet more. It is a fearful thing to have hard hearts under softening providences, and to have proud hearts under humbling ones. We may say of affliction as Paul said of the Law, "That which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." Men's hearts are of an anvil temper, made harder by affliction, and reverberate the blow. Guard against going farther from God under trials, against having recourse to sinful means and worldly appliances to extricate yourself from calamity, against despising "the chastening of the Lord, or fainting when thou art rebuked of Him." This course will either call down greater judgments, or provoke God to withhold chastisement altogether: which is the greatest of all judgments. The wrath of God is then suffered to accumulate, till it breaks down all the fences and barriers that restrained it, and then comes upon us to the uttermost. They that will not fear shall feel the wrath of heaven. The rods shall be changed into scorpions. "God shall wound the head of His enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses" (Psa. lxviii. 21.) The chapter closes with solemn threatening (Ver. 47.)

II. The design of affliction. God has designs of love in bringing them into the wilderness. "Then will I plead with you face to face." He pleads *with* them, not *against* them. 1. *With convincing power.* He will be justified when He speaketh. Job complained against his friends, but not against God. David was "dumb with silence" when the hand of God was upon him. 2. *With compassionate tenderness* (Hosea ii. 14, 15, 19-23). 3. *With long forbearance and condescension.*

III. The consolations of which this state is susceptible. 1. *From the Author of affliction consolation is derived.* God brings us into the wilderness; He neither drives us there nor leaves us there. Affliction is not casual, but designed by Him who knows us better than we know ourselves. It "springeth not from the dust." God pleads with us there. Better to hear His voice in thunder than to be deserted by him altogether. Better for Adam to be called from his hiding place by a voice of terror than to be allowed for ever to separate himself from God. It is rebuke, not destruction; mercy, not judgment; life, not death. It is the death of the sin, not the death of the soul. God says, "I will allure her." 2. *From its design.* The design of affliction is to embitter

sin, to separate the sin that God hates from the soul that He loves, to improve the character, to promote spirituality, to prevent greater sufferings, to inspire sympathy, to further usefulness, to prepare for higher enjoyments. God says, "I withheld thee from sinning against Me" (Gen. xx. 6). Paul was kept from pride, how? by the thorn in the flesh. God prevents us by the blessings of his goodness. By affliction, God *promotes self-knowledge*, humbles us and proves us to know what is in our heart. "I little thought," says one, "that I was so proud till I was called to stoop; or so impatient till required to wait; or so easily provoked till I met with such an offence; or so rooted to earth till so much force was required to detach me from it. 3. *From its promised support.* "I will be with thee in trouble." "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." 4. *From its ascertained issue.*

IV. There are some special lessons to be learned. 1. *Take heed that you do not plunge yourself into a wilderness.* By careless, sinful, inconsistent conduct. Self-made troubles are hard to bear. 2. *If you are in scenes of difficulty, be anxious to converse with Him who brought you there.* Though He "plead with you face to face," do not shun the intercourse, but submit, say, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me." 3. *Pray for those who are in the wilderness without a shepherd, and without a hope.* The heathen, the Jews, the ungodly, etc. 4. *Rejoice that the permanent home of God's people is not the wilderness.* They are there but for a short time on their way to a better country.

(*From MSS. Sermons by the Rev. S. Thodey.*)

(Vers. 39–44.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The prophet now declares the promise for the future. Israel is to be gathered again, and to be converted to the Lord.

Ver. 39. "Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also if ye will not hearken unto Me." "Jehovah here utterly disowns all relationship with the rebels. He would have idolatrous worship severed from all connexion with His name. The tone in which they are addressed is one of the keenest irony. Compare Rev. xxii. 11. It is as much as to say, Well, since you will not listen to Me and return to My service, you may take your own course; we henceforth part company. The expression "and afterwards" is intended to give emphasis to the address, and anticipates the continued apostacy of the rebels."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 40. "In the mountain of the height of Israel." Mount Moriah. "There shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve Me." Not the former rebellious house of Israel (ver. 39), but the people now restored to the practice of true religion. They should all congregate at the appointed festivals as of old, at Jerusalem. "There will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things." The Lord will then accept them with delight, and all their sacrificial gifts and offerings. This promise implies the bringing back of Israel from its banishment.

Ver. 41. "Your sweet savour." Heb., *Odour of satisfaction.* "This is the technical expression for the cheerful (well-pleased) acceptance of the sacrifice, or rather of the feelings of the worshipper presenting the sacrifice, which ascends to God in the sacrificial odour (Gen. viii. 21). The thought therefore is the following: When God shall eventually gather His people out of their dispersion, He will accept them as a sacrifice well-pleasing to Him, and direct all His good pleasure

towards them."—(*Keil.*) "And I will be sanctified in you before the heathen." "The restoration of the Hebrews from the captivity, and the re-establishment of their religious services, would have the double effect of procuring honour to Jehovah from the surrounding nations, and attesting in their own experience the happiness springing out of the true knowledge of the Divine character.—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 43. "And there shall ye remember your ways." In ver. 40 the outward acts of the religion are described; here we have that inner condition of spirit, that heart of repentance, which alone can make such acts acceptable to God.

Ver. 44. "And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for My name's sake." "The gathering of Israel from among the heathen will be fulfilled in its conversion to Christ, and hitherto it has only taken place in very small beginnings. The principal fulfilment is still to come, when Israel, as a nation, shall be converted to Christ."—(*Keil.*)

HOMILETICS.

Israel's Conversion to the Lord.

I. The divine method in their conversion. 1. *They were urged to decision.* "Go ye, serve ye every one his idols" (ver. 39). Make your choice, at once; let there be no double-heartedness. Make full proof of the idols ye have chosen, "If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings, xviii. 21). This would have the effect of detecting hypocrites, and bringing the true servants of the Lord to a full determination. 2. *They are brought to contrition.* Contrition for past sins always accompanies true conversion. Such a condition is produced (1) *By a remembrance of sin as a transgression against God.* "Ye shall remember your ways, and all your doings wherein ye have been defiled" ver. 43. Ye shall think of your sins as having defiled your souls, and therefore were contrary to the nature and will of a God who is holy, and whose commandment is holy, just, and good. (2.) *By self-loathing.* "Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils which ye have done." The conviction of sin, when brought home to a man, makes him to see himself in the true light.

II. The results of their conversion. 1. *They should be in reality what they had hitherto been only in name.* In ver. 39, they are addressed as, the "House of Israel," though they went after their idols. The name was but a hollow unreality. They are now the true "House of Israel" (ver. 40). They should still worship on the height, but that would be on God's holy mountain and with a pure worship (ver. 28). 2. *They should render an acceptable worship* (ver. 41). As they were in a right state of heart, their service of worship and offerings would be well-pleasing unto the Lord. The principle of Divine worship, in both Testaments, is the same,—"In spirit and in truth." 3. *The penalty of their sin should be remitted.* For their sins they were scattered; now they are to be restored (ver. 42). 4. *They should give God all the glory.* His forbearing mercy. His forgiving mercy. His mercy so great as not to be restrained by all their sins from granting the greatest gifts. 5. *Their conversion would promote the true knowledge of God.* (1) *Among the nations around them.* "I will be sanctified in you before the heathen." (ver. 41). The heathen would see that the God of Israel was holy, just in all His ways; yet merciful, and faithful to His covenant promises. (2) *Among themselves.* "And ye shall know that I am the Lord." (ver. 44). And there is a knowledge of God which we can gain

from the history of His dealings with His ancient people. We see that God brings His purposes to pass amidst all human opposition and rebellion. We know that, in the worst times, there has always been an elect remnant of faithful men to glorify Him. And the history of the past assures us that it will be thus in the future.

(Ver. 41).

"I will accept you with your sweet savour." The spirit of the Gospel is observable under the law. There can be but one way to heaven. David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were sinners saved by grace as much as Paul, and Peter, and John. And they were saved by the same Mediator. Let us consider the blessings promised in the text, and then we shall give some directions for the attainment and preservation of the enjoyment it reveals.

I. Some remarks upon the blessing promised. These are acceptance with God through a Redeemer, through His grace and righteousness. His sacrifice is as a sweet smelling savour, and the worship of His people is as incense acceptable to Him. Acceptance stands opposed to condemnation, and is enjoyed through faith in Christ. 1. *This blessing is the grand discovery of the gospel.* It is the design and end of all God's communications with men—"God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." 2. *It is always the result of an experience of the work of grace upon the soul.* It puts the life of hope into obedience. Our persons must be accepted before our works. 3. *It secures the true and right enjoyment of all temporal blessings.* To a man who has no sense of God's friendship, the best earthly enjoyments lose their charm; and to a man who has hope of pardon through Christ, all outward trials lose their sting. 4. *It is essential to a victory over death and a joyful eternity.*

II. Some directions for the attainment and enjoyment of this blessing. 1. *Look carefully to the fact of your own acceptance of Christ, and to the sincerity of your hearts in their covenant closure with Christ.* See that you take him, with the happiness He has promised, for your All. Take heed of looking after another felicity, or cherishing other hopes than those of which He is the Author and object. Christ is the great promise made to faith; and faith is the soul's acceptance of Christ as He is freely promised. To present Christ before us with all his gifts and blessings is the design of the Gospel; and to rest in Christ as the fountain of all our hope and joys is the first act of a believer. God prays you to accept Christ: as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God. 2. *Cherish habitual and confiding thoughts of the freeness and riches of God's grace through a Redeemer.* This will greatly kindle that love which brings its own evidence of its truth. This will make God appear more amiable in your eyes, and then you will love him more abundantly; and as your conscious love to Him increases your doubts and apprehensions will give way. So much love, so much comfort. Those right apprehensions of God also will do much to drive away those terrors which arise from false apprehensions of Him. Delightful objects draw the heart after them as the loadstone draws iron. In Christ you see goodness and mercy in its condescension, and brought nearer to you than the Divine nature originally was. In Christ God is come down into our nature, and so Infinite Goodness is become incarnate. 3. *Every day renew your apprehensions of the truth and value of the promised felicity.* Consider the end of your faith, in order to see the vain and delusive character of things below. Let not heaven lose with you its attractive force through your forgetfulness or unbelief. He is the best Christian who knows best why he is a

Christian. Look upon all present actions and conditions with a remembrance of their end. Value not earthly things beyond their true worth. Be not ambitious of that honour which must end in confusion, nor of the favour of those whom God will call His enemies. 4. *Guard against those snares and temptations which you know to be most hurtful to the life of religion in the soul.* 5. *Gather up and improve your own past experience of God's mercy towards you and others.* We do God and ourselves great wrong by forgetting, or not improving, our experience of His goodness. God does not give His mercies only for present use, but for the future also. What a wrong it is to God in your next trial to forget His last deliverance! Have not mercies come so unexpectedly, and in such a wonderful manner, that you have (as it were) the name of God written on them? (Judg. xiii. 23). "All my bones shall say, who is like unto thee." You may make great use also of the experience of others.

(*From MSS. Sermons by the Rev. S. Thodey*).

(Ver. 43.)

1. *Sense of mercies, rather than of judgments, makes sin bitter, and leads unto repentance.* Their captivity, and the sad things they suffered therein, did not embitter their sin unto them, and break their hearts; but God's kindness in bringing them out of Babylon into the land of Israel, that prevaileth with them; when they had received marvellous kindness from God, then they were marvellously affected, greatly ashamed of their ways, and loathed themselves. Mercies in Zion produced that which judgments in Babylon did not. Great mercies bestowed upon great sinners, do preach the doctrine of repentance most effectually, convincing them strongly of their unworthy and vile carriages towards the Lord. David's kindness brake the heart of Saul, and made him to weep and say, "Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil" (1 Sam. xxiv.) If human favour hath such influence into a sinful heart, what hath Divine? Moses, by his strokes, fetched water out of a rock; David, by his kindness. God sometimes by His judgments humbles men, and brings them to repentance, but mostly by His mercies. The sweet influences of the Gospel have pierced deeper into sinners' hearts than the terrors of the law. 2. *When the Lord gathers up His people out of the world, and brings them into nearer relation to Himself, into Canaan, and Church order, He looks that they should review their former ways and be much affected with them, and thoroughly repent for them.* When brought into Canaan, they were not only to eat the milk and honey, to behold the glory thereof, but they were to remember days of old, their sins in Babylon, how they had polluted themselves and provoked the Lord; and thereupon to mourn kindly for their unkindnesses to Him, who hath showed such marvellous loving-kindness unto them. When God brings man out of the world now unto Zion, gives them the milk and honey of the gospel, shows them the glory thereof, then they look back, wonder at their wickedness, and loathe themselves for it, saying, Who is like unto us in sin and wickedness, and who is like unto our God in grace and goodness, in pardon and forgiveness? (Micah vii. 18). When it shall please God to bring the Jews out of that Babylon they are now in, unto the true Canaan, the Church of Christ, they will remember their iniquities, their bitter and bloody doings against Christ, mourn and loathe themselves for the same (Zech. xii. 10; Rev. i. 7).) 3. *When repentance springs from sense of love and kindness, as it is real and deep, so it is secret and universal.* They should, being brought into Canaan, not only remember their sins, but they should loathe themselves, be displeased so with themselves, that they should smite and abhor themselves, and that in their

own sight, and for all the evils they had committed; when no eye saw them, they would spread all their sins before them, and in the sight and sense of them be vile in their own eyes.—(*Greenhill.*)

(Vers. 39–44).

EXEGETICAL NOTES. The destruction of Jerusalem under the image of a forest devoured by fire.

A comparison of these verses with Ch. xxi. 2-5, shows that they belong properly to Ch. xxi. They form the commencement of that chapter in the Hebrew Bible.

Ver. 46. "**Set thy face towards the south.**" "There are three words in the Hebrew text of this verse to express *south*. They are merely used as synonyms for the sake of varying the expression. The first signifies *to be on the right*, honoured with reference to the position of the quarter of the heavens when facing the east. The word is used both for the *right* hand and the *south*. The second word is of less frequent occurrence, and besides in our prophet, and once in the Pentateuch, is found only in Job and Ecclesiastes. The third word signifies *to be dry, dried up*: hence the south, where the heat of the sun is most severely felt. All the three terms specially apply here to the southern division of the Holy Land, of which at the time Jerusalem was the capital."—(*Henderson*). "**Drop thy word.**" "A very common expression for prophetic discourse (Deut. xxxii. 2). It is suggested by the rain or the dew, and points to the place of its origin,—above, and also to the beneficial influence which it is intended to exert, and is used even when the discourse does not contain promises merely, but also threatening and judgment, as is the case here exclusively, and to a large extent also in Deut. xxxii. May it not also hint at the concise, abrupt style of composition adopted in this chapter?"—(*Lange*). "**The forest of the south field.**" Forest is used figuratively to denote dense masses of people. The densely populated country of Judea is intended. Ezekiel here declares the doom of the Southern kingdom, as Amos had declared the doom of the Northern kingdom (Amos vii. 9, 11, 17).

Ver. 47. "**Every green tree in thee, and every dry tree.**" The righteous and the wicked (Ch. xxi. 3, 4). Our Lord probably refers to this passage in St. Luke xxiii. 31. "**The flaming fire shall not be quenched.**" The fierce flame of God's jealousy (Cant. viii. 6). "**All faces.**" "Every single thing in the forest, which is caught at once by the flame. From south to north, *i.e.*, through the whole length of the land. From the terrible fierceness of the fire, which cannot be extinguished, every one will know that God has kindled it, that it has been sent in judgment."—(*Keil.*)

Ver. 49. "**They say of Me, doth he not speak parables?**" They wish to get rid of the application of the prophecy to themselves by describing it as obscure. They pretend not to understand it. "At the same time, it contains within itself a request that they may be explained. This request is granted; and the simile is first of all interpreted in Ch. xxi. 1–7; and then still further explained in verses 8, etc."—(*Keil.*) "The riddle is easy to solve, and the prophet has to do with a sharp-witted people; but the hearers *will* not understand, because the truth is unpleasant to them, and retire with a certain irony behind the difficulty of the form, and make as if they did not understand. To take away this miserable excuse from them, to punish them for their ironical hardness of hearing, he expresses the same in clear and plain terms in the following passage."—(*Hengstenberg.*)

HOMILETICS.

(Ver. 46.)

"Drop thy word towards the south." Heb. Drop towards the south. The word properly signifies the dropping of the clouds, or rain, and is metaphorically put for prophesying and preaching. These are likened unto rain or the droppings thereof. 1. *In respect of the flowing and succession of one drop after another.* "The heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water" (Judg. v. 4). So in prophesying, there is one word, one truth after another. 2. *In respect to the influence thereof.* The drops soak into the earth; so words have influence into men's ears and hearts (Deut. xxxii. 2). As the rains and dews insinuate themselves into the grass and ground, so do words into the heads and hearts of men (Psa. cxix. 130). 3. *In respect to the trouble and hurt that oft rains and droppings produce.* "A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike" (Prov. xxvii. 15), alike grievous, troublesome, wasting, and wearying; so prophesying of judgments and destruction is grievous and troubles much; it is like great rains and drops (2 Chron. xxxiv. 25). The Hebrew is, "shall drop upon this place." There should be a storm, and such great drops of God's wrath as should consume it. (*Greenhill.*)

The word of God is rightly likened to rain. Like rain, it descends from above, and not according to man's will; it is also, like it, useful and beneficial; as rain flows down from rocks upon the fields, so the word of God upon the godless, and, on the other hand, into pious hearts; and, like the rain, it is not equally acceptable to all. (*Fessel.*)

The Prophecy of Jerusalem's Destruction.

(Vers. 45–49.)

Consider this prophecy—

I. As to its form. This prophecy is uttered in a poetical form, most wild and rugged. The awful and the terrible, as well as the beautiful and tender, find their expression in poetry. The imagery here is that of a forest on fire, and its devouring flame raging beyond the control of man. The boldness of the image will account for the strange and wild forms of the expressions used, and the rapid transitions from one thought to another. We can only understand the style of the Bible, in its prophetic writings, when we consider the intensity and depth of those feelings which possessed the minds of the prophets.

II. As to its substance. The "forests" signify multitudes—the great masses of the population upon whom terrible judgments are about to fall. 1. *The judgments are irresistible.* The power of God, which is a righteous power, would be at work in them. The storms of the Almighty rush over the forest, and the trees must bend. Moreover, God sends fire, against which nothing can prevail. "The flaming fire shall not be quenched." 2. *The judgments fall even upon the righteous.* "And it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree." The "dry tree" would be fuel for the flame, but so great would be the destruction that even the "green tree" could not escape. Judgment would come even upon the house of God. Even the people of God have sins enough to bring upon them great calamities. "I will kindle a fire in thee," in Jerusalem, the centre of religious life, of Church privileges. Like a raging fire, God's judgments devour all before them. 3. *The ungodly are admonished by the afflictions of the righteous.* The prophet Zechariah warns

the people that, when the great and noble among their countrymen fall, they cannot possibly escape, "Howl, fir tree, for the cedar is fallen" (Zech. xi. 2.) This is but another form of the Apostle's statement; "If judgment first begin at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of Christ?" It is the very truth which the same apostle puts in the form of a question, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" When our Lord bids the daughters of Jerusalem to weep for themselves for the destruction which was about to come upon their devoted city, He adds, "For if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (St. Luke xxiii. 31). When the green tree cannot stand before the flame, how can the dry tree hope to escape! Christ was righteous, yet He did not escape the judgments of sin. He suffered for sin. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him and to put Him to grief." "He was numbered with the transgressors." We can see how real a thing sin is, and how hateful in the sight of God, when we reflect how terribly the effects of it were visited upon Jesus Christ, the Righteous. And God employs judgments to purify His people; yet, even in their case, these are truly chastisements. God is specially severe in His judgments upon the chosen people, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." His very intimacy with them, is put forward as a reason for leaving no iniquity unpunished. In all His dealings with His chosen, God has ever acted upon this principle. Witness the wanderings and sufferings of the patriarchs—the dispersions and captivities of Israel—the untimely death of Moses and of Aaron—the troubles of Eli—the sorrows of David—the present afflictions of the righteous. If the green trees thus suffer, the dry cannot be spared.

III. **As to its reception.** The prophecy is objected to as obscure, as a dark and mysterious saying. "Then said I, Ah, Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?" As if they said, "He is a speaker of parables, a mere utterer of dark sayings." There is probably a vein of irony in these words with which the hearers received the prophet's message; as if they would thus speak, "It is a clever saying of things which sound very terrible, if we could only understand it." *Sinners never want excuses for neglecting the prophet's message.* Either the message is too dark and mysterious, or else it is too simple. If the prophet announces unwelcome truths, and touches their conscience, they cry out against him. If he threatens God's judgments, he is not to their mind. They will have none but those who prophesy smooth things. *Thus men find fault now with God's revelation.* If He says what we already know, we think it is superfluous: we do not want a revelation to teach us *that*. If He says one word beyond what nature or reason might have taught us, we say it is irrational. One plain declaration of the Bible we pronounce as inconsistent with probability, another as inconsistent with some human authority, another as inconsistent with God's justice, and another as inconsistent with Christian charity. *And in the same way men treat the proofs and evidences of religion.* One does not like miracles, and another objects to the very idea of prophecy. The one saying, that it is altogether unworthy of God to suspend His own laws; and the other, that it is unworthy of God to dignify human persons by the prediction of their names and deeds. Another will hear of nothing but the internal evidence of the truth, the goodness of the word spoken, the comfort conveyed to his own heart. And what each man does not personally like, he casts aside as of no value. Objections of this kind are often but mere excuses. The real repugnance is to the idea of being taught anything from God or His prophets. Neither the ministry of John the Baptist nor even of Christ Himself could please the evil generation of their day. "But wisdom is justified of her children."

The Fire and Sword of Divine Justice go forth against Heathenised Jerusalem. (Chap. xxi.).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The people had turned all their hopes towards the mother country,—the city and kingdom. The prophet shows this to be a delusion. The sword of the Lord will cut off Jerusalem and the land of Israel, both righteous and wicked. (ver. 1–17). The instrument to be used is the king of Babylon, who will draw his sword against Jerusalem and the children of Ammon, first putting an end to the kingdom of Judah, and then destroying the Ammonites (vers. 18–23). The design is, to withdraw the people from their delusions, and to teach them that they must trust no longer in human policy but rather in repentance towards God.

Vers. 1–7. The sword of the Lord is to be drawn against Jerusalem, in which the people placed all their confidence.

Ver. 2. "**The holy places.**" "Heb. *sanctuaries.* These include not only the temple with its holy places, but also the other edifices appropriated in purer times to Divine worship, and afterwards called synagogues" (Psa. lxxiii.17)—(*Henderson*). Hengstenberg refers the plural to the glory of the one sanctuary, and understands it of "the spiritual abode of the people." Others account for the plural form of the word by understanding it of the individual buildings of the temple, its two or three parts." "**The land of Israel.**" Equivalent to "the forest of the south field." (Ezek. xx. 46).

Ver. 3. "**My sword.**" "The fire kindled by the Lord is interpreted as being the sword of the Lord. It is true that this is a figurative expression; but it is commonly used for war, which brings with it devastation and death, and would be generally intelligible."—*(Keil.)* "**Out of his sheath.**" The sword of God had rested in its sheath for above 400 years. In the days of David it was suspended over Jerusalem; but the arm of the Destroying Angel was then "stayed." David by God's direction offered burnt-offerings on the very place where the temple was afterwards built; and the destroying sword was returned "into the sheath thereof" (1 Chron. xxi. 16, 27; xxii. 1). God's forbearance was the sheath in which it rested so long. Now Israel had become heathenized, the vile profanation of God's altar was no longer to be endured, and the sword must again leave its scabbard. "**The righteous and the wicked.**" "This is not in contradiction with Ch. ix. 4, according to which the righteous, amidst the impending catastrophe, are the object of the protecting and sustaining activity of God. For if two suffer the same, yet it is not the same. To those who love God must *all things* be for the best" (Rom. viii. 28).—*(Hengstenberg.)* "There is no real contradiction between the doctrine taught in this passage, and that vindicated ch. xviii. Though removed from their native land along with the wicked, inasmuch as they were nationally connected with them, yet the righteous were to be regarded only as the subjects of corrective discipline, whereas to the idolatrous Jews the sufferings were unmitigated punishment."—*(Henderson.)*

Ver. 4. "**From the south to the north.**" The whole extent of the country, from Dan to Beersheba.

Ver. 5. "**It shall not return any more.**" It shall go on to make a full end. The same idea as in ch. xx. 48, where it is stated that the fire of God's judgments shall not be quenched.

Ver. 6. "**Sigh, therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins.**" The loins are said to be broken when acute pain robs a man of all power and strength (Deut. xxxiii. 11). "The more deeply to affect his countrymen with a sense of the dire calamities which were so soon to overtake them,

the prophet is commanded openly to assume the appearance of a person in deep distress, clasping his loins with his hands, as sadly bruised; and, giving utterance to piteous groans in the bitterness of his spirit, he was to present himself before them."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 7. "For the tidings, because it cometh." "That which to others is merely *tidings*, is to the prophet already coming, or it is to him a 'thing heard' which is passing into fulfilment; therefore his pain. But they shall be compelled to experience in themselves what they perceive in him. In all, courage gives place to terror, activity to prostration, counsel to perplexity. No one holds out any longer."—(*Lange.*) "All knees shall be weak as water." They become like water in laxity and incoherence. Their strength is, as it were, dissolved, flows away and is scattered in all directions.

HOMILETICS.

(Vers. 6, 7.)

Such fear should possess them upon the tidings of the Babylonish army's approaching, as should make their rocky hearts melt as snow before the sun, or fat of lambs before the fire; and the hands, spirits, and knees of their stoutest man to be feeble, faint, and weak; so that they should be inept unto all services, especially military ones. 1. *God will have the prophet to see what prophetical signs will do, when prophetical threats did nothing.* "Sigh, son of man, with the breaking of thy loins," &c. These were prophetical sighs, representing unto them the great evils which were coming upon them; that so they might consider, sigh in like manner for their sins, and prevent their destruction, or else certainly expect the same. God laid a heavy burden upon the prophet when he is called so to sigh. 2. *Ill tidings sink the hearts and spirits of hypocrites and wicked ones.* When they hear of wars and great forces coming against them, not only doth their mirth cease, but their hearts, hands, spirits, knees fail them. When Nebuchadnezzar came their hands were upon their loins, they knew not what to do, whither to go, where to hide themselves. But in Psa. cxii. 7, it is said of a godly man, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."—(*Greenhill.*)

(Ver. 1–7.)

God's Sword of Vengeance against Jerusalem.

The parabolic character of vers. 45–49 in the last chapter is continued. Then the destruction by fire was threatened; now it is the sword. Of this sword of vengeance against Israel for their sins we learn:—

I. It was lifted against those things in which the people trusted most. "Toward Jerusalem, the holy places, the land of Israel" (ver. 2). The Jews turned their faces towards Jerusalem when they prayed in war, or in a foreign land. The sword of the Lord was to be drawn against all those glories of their country in which they most prided themselves. The candlestick will be removed from unfaithful churches.

II. It was manifestly the Sword of the Lord. "My sword" (ver. 3). Human instruments were to be used, human passions; yet behind all these,

and directing them, God was working out his own purposes. The swords were His, though men bare them. This will teach us to judge rightly of war, wherein the enmities of nations are so controlled by Providence that they are made to minister to the moral and intellectual welfare of the human race. God "maketh the wrath of man to praise Him," and the "remainder" of that wrath, which might work but unmixed evil, He restrains from so futile a purpose. He can punish by whatever instrument He pleases. And because this judgment coming upon Jerusalem and the land of Israel is described as the sword of God, it follows that that judgment is a *reality*. The prophet is to drop his word of prophecy toward Jerusalem. That "word" was not a mere sound; but a sword, a real calamity. With God, words stand for things which have a real existence. The threatenings against sinners, however they may be disregarded in the present, will in the future have a terribly real meaning.

III. It was long threatened before it was drawn to smite. "And will draw forth My sword out of his sheath" (ver. 3). It had lain in the sheath for 400 years, during all their wanderings and rebellions. The sheath in which God's sword of vengeance lies unused is His forbearance.

IV. It still hangs over unrighteous nations. "It shall not return any more," but "go forth against all flesh" (vers. 4, 5). This was the sword of the Chaldeans: it was followed by the sword of the Romans. And so the sword of God will rest not until the last Antichrist and his desolation. Israel fell beneath the stroke of God for her sins, and who then can escape? Whole nations have perished for lack of righteousness.

V. The thought of it should produce the greatest terror and alarm. 1. *In the prophet who utters the threat of it.* "Sigh therefore, thou son of man" (ver. 6). The sigh is the momentary failure of the heart when suddenly overcome by the thought of sorrow. It answers to the tongue dumb with silence at the tidings of some overwhelming calamity. The prophet charged with the message is to sigh, as if completely overcome. Even God's people may well tremble when they think of His judgments (Dan. ix. 4, etc.). Christ wept over Jerusalem at the thought of her doom, and as if unwilling to abandon her to her enemies. It is with reluctance that the Almighty Judge pronounces sentence. Judgment is God's "strange work." The preacher who wishes to affect the feelings of others must feel himself. The thought of God's sword of vengeance should produce the greatest terror and alarm,—2. *In the people to whom his message is delivered.* If the prophet who simply announces the judgments is bidden to sigh, what must they do on whom the judgments are to fall! The prophet is to sigh for the tidings, "because it cometh." He knows that they shall be fulfilled in grim reality. Therefore he announces that as concerning the people, "Every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water" (ver. 17). They refused *to hear*, now they shall be made to *feel*. Those who were so insolent in prosperity, and defied God, become, when His judgments fall upon them, faint-hearted and desolate. "Weak as water:" the strength of the most daring sinners melts away before the righteous anger of God.

EXEGETICAL NOTES. (Verses 8–17.) The sword is sharpened for slaying. As they are a people who refuse to understand, the judgment is announced in the plainest terms.

Ver. 9. "And also furbished." As if the sword so long unused had rusted in its sheath. "The repetition—*a sword, a sword*, is not without effect—definitely pointing to the destructive

weapon to be employed in the war. To augment the terror which the announcement was calculated to inspire, the sword is described as *sharpened*, prepared to do execution, and also *polished*. The glittering of a highly-polished sword, wielded in the sun, is truly terrific (Deut. xxxii. 41; Job xx. 25").—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 10. **It is sharpened to make a sore slaughter.** Heb. *That slaying it may slay.* It is made ready not for display, but for its terrible work of judgment. **It is furbished that it may glitter.** Heb. *Have lightning*, Comp. ver. 28. This is the sword spoken of in Deut. xxxii. 41, where the expression, "My glittering sword" is literally "the lightning of My sword." Such also is the sword wielded by the Cherubim (Ezek. i. 13, 14), and by those who were the avengers of God's broken Law. (Exod. xix. 16). **"Should we then make mirth?"** Nothing could be worse-timed than to make light of these judgments. **"It contemneth the rod of My son, as every tree."** "My son," is the same as "My people," in ver. 12. The expression, *the rod of My son*, is the genitive of object—i.e., the instrument employed in punishing My son. In accordance with this is the rendering of the Revised Version, "The rod of My son, it contemneth every tree." The sword of Nebuchadnezzar was the rod which punished God's people, and that rod of the universal conqueror set at nought all others.

Ver. 11. **"And He hath given it to be furbished that it may be handled."** "He hath given," used impersonally for *and it is given*, according to an idiom common in Hebrew. "The instrument of destruction was quite prepared, and only required to be employed by Jehovah against His apostate people."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 12. **"For it shall be upon My people"** The object of the Chaldean expedition is here clearly pointed out. The Jews were not to delude themselves with the idea that it was Egypt or any other neighbouring nation that was to come under the judgment of God's avenging sword. The punishment would fall upon themselves.

Ver. 13. **"Because it is a trial."** "These words point with the utmost brevity to the character of the impending time, which presented itself in rosy hues to the politically excited people. Trial is a terrible word to a people that suffers the deepest calamities. When the trial comes, nothing remains undisclosed, nothing unrequited; every varnish disappears, and all glitter vanishes." —(*Hengstenberg*). **"And what if the sword contemn even the rod? it shall be no more, saith the Lord God."** "With a view to the sanguine imaginations by which the people sought to banish the thought of the hardness of the times, the prophet then asks, 'And how? should the despising rod (the punishment that far outstrips all other punishments, ver. 10) not be?' And the answer to this question he gives in the names of God, which utter a loud *no* to these illusions."—(*Hengstenberg.*) "If Nebuchadnezzar should really despise the resistance made by the Jewish state, which he did (ver. 10)—what was to be expected as the consequence? That state must necessarily come to an end, *it shall not be.* Such I regard as the meaning of this most difficult verse." —(*Henderson.*) The general idea of the text is, what if, under this terrible judgment, Judah's temporal power and royalty shall cease to exist? And in ver. 27, we are told that this result shall certainly come to pass. But the kingdom shall be restored by One whose sceptre of righteousness despises every earthly power.

Ver. 14. **"And let the sword be doubled the third time."** "These words are designed to express the tremendous size and power of the sword to be employed. It was no ordinary foe that was to attack the Jews. All hopes of escape were vain. It was a sword that had been well tried, and proved suc-

cessful in many a battle,—*the sword of the slain.*"—(*Henderson.*) 'Which entereth into their privy chambers." It will invade the sanctity of their houses (Deut. xxxii. 25). There may be some reference also to its penetrating into their secret "chambers of imagery" (Ezek. viii. 12).

Ver. 15. "I have set the point of the sword against all their gates." The gates of their city are to be besieged by the naked sword. "And their ruins be multiplied." Heb., *And the fallen be numerous in all their gates.* "Wrapped up for the slaughter." Rather, made keen, or sharpened, for the slaughter.

Ver. 16. "Go thee one way or other, either on the right hand or on the left, whithersoever thy face is set." The address is to the sword, as if it were an army. The "right" and "left" show how wide is the area over which God shall execute His judgments; so wide that it embraces not only Judea, but a whole group of peoples. The word "whithersoever" seems to imply the idea of direction by the "living creatures" (Ezek. i. 9, 12).

Ver. 17. "I will also smite Mine hands together." "By a strong anthropopathy Jehovah declares He will do what He had commanded the prophet to do (ver. 14). Smiting the hands together is an indication of violent grief. "I will cause My fury to rest" signifies, not the forbearing to pour it out in judgment, but the full and permanent infliction of it" (*Henderson*). The fury of God is said to "rest" when it reaches its object, thus abiding upon it. "Jehovah will smite His hands together and cool His wrath upon them" (*Keil*).

HOMILETICS.

The Sacred, terrible sword-song.

The prophets doubtless treated politics both on their outward and inward side, but only the politics of the kingdom of God (ver. 9). God shows us the sword, and waves it over our heads, so that we should be duly and profitably alarmed. He can use every creature as His sword; it is always prepared to execute His command. War as a divine judgment, therefore, for the punishment of evil doers; but it is also a preaching of repentance, when God sharpens the sword and makes it glitter. He who will not submit to the sword of God's word (Heb. iv. 12) will be overtaken by the sword of the enemy. God Himself takes the offering which men will not give Him voluntarily (ver. 10). There can be joy amid the deepest sufferings, but not over another's suffering, especially when it is punishment for sin. The sin of the people presses the sword into the hand for war (ver. 11). Sin was also interwoven with the conquering chaplets of the victors, as the dew upon these chaplets was innumerable tears and drops of blood. This must ever be remembered amid songs of triumph! Fortune of war, as men call it, what a sad fortune! God is the judge behind and in the conqueror. "Upon all the princes of Israel" (ver. 12.) Even the great have no privilege to sin. Trial is a terrible word to a people that suffers the deepest calamities. A tried sword is a dreadful thing when it turns against a people whom God has given up to judgment. One day an end will be made of all despisers of God and man. The history of the world as the fulfilment of prophecy (ver. 14). Symbolical prophecy—the emblems of punishment. Some must prophesy judgment who would so willingly speak of redemption, and redemption alone; men will not have the blessing, and therefore the curse must be exhibited.

God's sword draws not back from human elevation; it reaches the dwellers in the valley, and those also who sit on lofty seats. No earthly throne is a protection from the sword of God; the history of the world is filled with proofs of this. The last mighty pierced-through one is Antichrist. Alas, who can hide from the wrath of God!—*(Lange.)*

(Ver. 13).

"Because it is a trial." We may consider vers. 12, 13 as thus understood: There is cause thou shouldst cry, howl, smite upon thy thigh, because the sword shall be a trial; and what also if it shall not be a despising rod? If it be a trying rod, there is cause enough to mourn, but it shall be a despising rod, and so there is more cause to mourn. If this rod make them not try their ways, repent, and turn, it shall be a rod to despise the stoutest of them and to destroy them. 1. *That the judgments of God are trials.* They discover and make known what people are. The fire tries the metals, and declares what is good silver, good gold and what is reprobate. God kept the children of Israel forty years in the wilderness, to prove them, and know what was in their hearts (Deut. viii. 8). The hard things they met with there discovered some to be murmurers, some idolaters, some fornicators, some backsliders. "It shall come to pass that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God" (Isa. viii. 21). When evil was upon them, then their wickedness appeared. So Jehoram said, "This evil is of the Lord, why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" His vileness came out in the time of his distress. When great winds are abroad, they discover what trees are sound or rotten. 2. *God tries before he destroys.* Rods of trial came before rods of destruction. When the sword is drawn, furbished, and whet, the Lord tries men thereby, whether they will consider their ways, repent and turn to Him, before He cut and destroy therewith. Tidings and terrors of the sword precede the strokes of it. God tries His people by threatenings, by bringing judgments near unto them, by inflicting lesser judgments upon them, before He makes an utter destruction of them; that they may learn righteousness, humble themselves, and so either prevent the judgments, or have them turned into mercies. 3. *When rods of trial do us no good, then follow rods of destruction.* When the trying rod hath been despised, then comes the rod that will not regard high or low, prince or people. At first God did lightly afflict Zebulun and Napthali, but that being in vain, afterwards He afflicts them more grievously (Isa. ix. 1). When Dimon profited not by her first strokes, God laid more upon her (Isa. xv. 9). When smiting the lintel of the door, and shaking the posts, did not prevail, then did the Lord cut and slay with the sword (Amos ix. 1). If fear work not, He hath a pit; if that do it not, He hath a snare (Isa. xxiv. 17, 18). When paternal chastisements profit not, God hath destroying judgments. He will deal then with men, not as erring children, but as open enemies.—*(Greenhill.)*

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—(Vers. 18–22). The sword of the king of Babylon will smite Jerusalem, and then the Ammonites.

Ver. 19. "Appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come." The force of this word, "appoint," is to draw a symbolic sketch, to give an ocular demonstration. Ezekiel is to draw on a table or tablet a sketch of the siege of Jerusalem. The Hebrew word rendered "choose" in the latter part of the verse has the primary meaning of *to cut*, and points to the cutting or engraving of a repre-

sentation. "Both twain shall come forth out of one land." Or, "the land of one, *i.e.*, the land of the Babylonish king, from which both ways shall proceed. "Choose thou a place, choose it at the head of the way to the city." "The 'one land' whence the two ways proceeded was that of Babylon, and the ways ran in a westerly direction; the more northerly by Riblah in Syria; and the more southerly by Tadmor, or Palmyra, in the desert. The former was that usually taken from Babylon to Jerusalem; the latter from the same city to Rabbah on the east of the Jordan. The prophet is directed to choose a place at the head of the way, or as it is literally, to *cut a hand* (Heb. *yod*, a hand or a sign), a sign pointing to the direction in which the Chaldean army was to proceed. This he was to place *at the head* or commencement *of the way*, where the two roads separated, each taking its own course; while we are necessarily to understand its being made to point towards that which the King of Babylon was to select, as we are taught in ver. 21. Our authorised translators have adopted the secondary signification of the word *to cut*, by rendering it *choose*. That the hand is not supposed to have been formed by sculpture, would appear from the circumstance that, in case it had been so, a different Hebrew verb would have been employed. It may have been made of wood, just like our finger-posts, with the representation of a city cut in it. The word *city* is purposely indefinite, the Article being left to be supplied by the consciences of those whom the prophet addressed." —*Henderson.*)

Ver. 20. "That the sword may come to Rabbah of the Ammonites." "It may at first sight appear inappropriate that Rabbah, the metropolis of the country of the Ammonites, should be mentioned before Jerusalem, the guilty city against which the prophet was especially commissioned to denounce the Divine judgments; but, considering to what an extent the Jews had adopted the idols of the Ammonites, there was a singular propriety in first taking up the heathen city, to intimate that as the Jews had participated in its crimes so they might expect to share in its punishment. *Rabbah of the children of Ammon*, so called to distinguish it from a city of the same name in the tribe of Judah. It was built on the banks of the river *Moret-Amman*, which empties itself into the Jabbok." (*Henderson.*) "Judah in Jerusalem the defenced." The royal house of Judah was the special object of Nebuchadnezzar's indignation. "The defenced"; same word as in Deut. xxviii. 52, "thy high and fenced walls, wherein thou trustedst." It was Zedekiah's trust in the strong fortifications of Jerusalem that led him to break faith with his sovereign. "Instead of simply expressing the name of Jerusalem, the other metropolis, that of the inhabitants is prefixed, to mark them as the guilty objects of the Divine indignation. The reason why Jerusalem is here said to be *defenced* would seem to be to intimate the vain confidence which the Jews reposed in their fortifications." (*Henderson.*)

Ver. 21. "The King of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination; he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver." "Nebuchadnezzar is supposed to have marched his army to a certain point to the west of Babylon, where the road branched off into the two referred to. The 'parting' (Heb. *the* mother of the way), so-called, not as generally supposed, because there the road divided, for that is immediately afterwards described as *the head of the two ways*, but because it was the principal road. Here the monarch is represented as having been at a loss to determine which of the routes he should take; and, in order to decide, as having recourse to divination. Of this as practised by the ancients there were different kinds, some of which are here mentioned. 'Made his arrows bright;'

Heb. *he shook the arrows—i.e.*, the helmet, quiver, or whatever else they were put into. It is most probable that he caused the name Jerusalem to be inscribed on one arrow, and Rabbah on another, and mixing them with others, determined to march against the city whose name was first drawn out. This mode of divining by arrows was practised by the Arabs till the time of Mohammed, who strictly prohibited it in the Koran. Another species of divination to which the King of Babylon had recourse, was that of looking into the liver or the entrails of a newly-killed sacrifice, and judging that any undertaking would be prosperous or otherwise according as they were found in a healthy or unhealthy state. This art is mentioned by Diodorus as practised among the Chaldeans. Not satisfied with the use of these two species of divination, Nebuchadnezzar consulted the *Teraphim*, which appear to have been penates or family gods, from whom it was thought possible to obtain information relative to future events (Gen. xxxi. 19, 34; Judges xvii. 5; xviii. 14)."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 22. **At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem."** The king with his right hand draws out the arrow on which was marked the name Jerusalem. The omen decides for him, and he is represented as holding up the arrow to encourage his army in their march against Jerusalem. **"To open the mouth in the slaughter."** "This expression cannot well be taken in its usual signification of murder, but must be understood, as Gesenius explains, as an *outbreak* of the voice; both terms thus energetically expressing the horrible war-shout of the Chaldean soldiers when commencing the attack."—(*Henderson.*) "The slaughter-cry of the besiegers is called slaughter, because the slaughter is virtually contained in it."—(*Hengstenberg*).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Vers. 23-27. Though this announcement of God's judgments will appear to the people of Judea as a deceptive divination, yet it will surely come to pass. The prophet, however, sees beyond all these evils the hope of redemption. The Messiah is promised, who is to be the founder and restorer of perfect right on earth (ver. 27). See also, Psa. lxii.; Isa. ix. 6; xlii. 1; Jer. xxiii. 5; xxxiii. 17.

Ver. 23. **"And it shall be unto them as a false divination in their sight, to them that have sworn oaths, but He will call to remembrance the iniquity, that they may be taken."** "Though the Jews were prone themselves to believe in divination, yet they affect to despise it when it tells against them. The second 'to them' may be understood to refer to the Jews, as they had come under solemn engagements to be subject to the Babylonians, but those engagements they had violated; and for this, as well as their other sins, they were now to be punished. The oaths were those the Jews had taken to the King of Babylon. 'He will call to remembrance,' refers to Nebuchadnezzar, to whom the Jews had proved faithless, and who now should recall to their mind the crime of perjury, of which they had been guilty."—(*Henderson*).

Ver. 24. **"So that in all your doings your sins do appear."** They dragged their old sins into light again by the new enormities which they committed. Their rebellion against God is here spoken of as "your iniquity," "transgressions," "sins." These words are the same as those mentioned in connection with the offerings on the day of Atonement, when "a remembrance was made of sins" (Lev. xvi; Heb. x. 3). Then the people confessed their sins and were forgiven; but now they refuse to acknowledge their guilt (Ezek. xviii. 2), and so their sin is "discovered," it stands over for punishment.

Ver. 25. **"And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel."** Zedekiah is pointed out by name as the prince whose

wickedness had desecrated his character as the Lord's anointed. "When iniquity shall have an end." Heb., *In the time of final iniquity.* Their iniquity was now full, when justice can no longer stay her hand (Gen. xv. 16). It was the treachery of Zedekiah towards Nebuchadnezzar that brought their national affairs to the crisis, to the time of judgment. In the person of that wicked prince the temporal sovereignty of David's house received a wound from which it never recovered. He brought complete destruction upon the Jewish state.

Ver. 26. "Remove the diadem." More accurately, "the mitre." Besides this passage, the word is found only in Exod. xxviii., xxix, xxxix; Lev. viii., xvi.; and it is always used of the High Priest's mitre. "The crown." The regal crown. This word occurs in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, but only in the history of David's conquest of Rabbah (2 Sam. xii. 30); 1 Chron. xx. 2). "Ideally regarded, the king bears, as the representative of the whole people, along with the crown, the *head band*, or priestly cap. The two are closely connected. The crown without the band is an empty show. The forgiveness of sins, which was secured by the mediation of the high priest, whose dignity was overthrown with the fall of the sanctuary forms the foundation of all the royal blessings of God. In the Messiah, in whom the kingdom attained to its full reality, a real union of the kingly and priestly offices is to take place (Zech. vi.), which were practically divided under the Old Testament on account of human weakness."—*(Hengstenberg).* "This shall not be the same." (Heb.) *This is not this.* The meaning is that there shall be a complete revolution in the existing state of things. By a sad reversal, the hallowed nation is unholy; the mitre which had written on it, "Holiness to the Lord," is profaned, the regal crown disgraced by such wickedness is laid in the dust. All things, hitherto sacred, have now become unreal, and must be swept away by a righteous judgment. "Exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high." "In a general overthrow the low is exalted even by the fact that it becomes like the high, who are involved in the same downfall. The people have in their procedure turned the lowest into the highest, and in just retribution the same takes place in their experience. All is levelled."—*(Hengstenberg).* "This is not to be taken as the enunciation of a general truth, but it is to be understood specifically of the Messiah and of Zedekiah. There is a direct reference to the Messiah in the following verse. The two are here placed in the strongest contrast:—the root out of the dry ground (Isa. liii. 2), whom the prophet sees in the future, and the haughty monarch immediately present to his view upon the royal Jewish throne. The commands given in this verse are a strong mode of declaring prophetically that the things should be done."—*(Henderson).*

Ver. 27. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it." (Heb.) *An overthrow, overthrow, overthrow, will I make it.* The threefold repetition is intensive, conveying the idea that there shall be overthrow upon overthrow. "And it shall be no more." The words can be rendered, *even this is no more.* The kingdom, though constituted by God Himself, should perish, as though it had never been. "Until He come, whose right it is; and I will give it Him." There is an evident reference here to Gen. xlix. 10. Judah's royalty is taken away, but not for ever. His inherent dignity persists through all the wreck of his fortunes and hopes, until it is assumed by the Messiah, who has both the right and the power to rule. The outward royalty and priesthood must pass away, but the true King of Israel is coming, who is also a "Priest upon His throne." (Zech. vi. 13; Acts iii. 14; Heb. vii. 26; Zech. ix. 9).

"Nowhere is there rest, nowhere security, all things are in a state of flux, till the coming of the Great Restorer and Prince of Peace. He to whom this right belongs, and to whom God will give it, is the Messiah, of whom the prophets from the times of David onwards have prophesied as the founder and restorer of perfect right on earth (Psa. lxxii.; Isa. ix. 6; xlii. 1; Jer. xxiii. 5; xxxiii. 17)."—*(Keil).*

"It is not expressly said what was to be given Him, and should stand waiting for its proper possessor till He should come; but the context forbids us to understand anything less than what was taken away—the things represented by the priestly mitre and the royal crown. The true priestly dignity, and the proper regal glory, were to be gone for a time into abeyance; some partial, temporary and fluctuating possession of them might be regained, but nothing more; the adequate and permanent realization was only to be found in the person of Messiah, because in Him alone was there to be a fitting representation of the Divine righteousness. It is true that there was something like a restoration of the standing and honour of the priesthood after the return from the Babylonian exile; and if the ideas currently entertained upon the subject were correct, there might appear in that a failure of the prophecy. But there was no right restoration of the priestly, any more than of the regal dignity at the time specified; it was but a shadow of the original glory. For there was no longer the distinctive prerogative of the Urim and Thummim, nor the ark of the covenant, nor the glory overshadowing the mercy-seat; all was in a depressed and mutilated condition, and even that subject to many interferences from the encroachments of foreign powers. So much only was given, both in respect to the priesthood and the kingdom, as to show that the Lord had not forsaken His people, and to serve as a pledge of the coming glory. But it was to the still prospective, rather than the present state of things, that the eye of faith was still directed to look for the proper restoration. And lest any should expect otherwise, the prophet Zechariah, after the return from Babylon, took up the matter, as it were, where Ezekiel had left it, and intimated in the plainest manner, that what was then accomplished was scarcely worth taking into account; it was, at the most, but doing in a figure what could only find its real accomplishment in the person and work of Messiah (Zech. vi. 14). Thus the mitre and the crown were both to meet in Him, and the temple in its noblest verse be built and the glory be obtained, such as became the Lord's Anointed to possess. Meanwhile, all was but preparatory and imperfect."—*(Fairbairn).*

HOMILETICS.

(Ver. 27.)

The word "overturn" is trebled, to show not only the certainty and evidence of the thing, but the gradation and continuance of it; for the kingdom of Judah by certain degrees fell from its height. After that Zedekiah was deposed, there was no crown nor king more in Judah. After the captivity there were no kings, but governors, captains, rulers; after them the high priests had the power, in whose hands it continued, even to Hyrcanus, who usurping kingly authority was miserably slain—Herod, a stranger, succeeding. "Until He come whose right it is." The crown shall neither fit, nor be fastened to any head, till He come that hath the right to it; and that is neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Zerubbabel; nor Aristobulus, Alexander, or Hyrcanus, who assumed kingly

dignity to themselves, in time of the Maccabees; but Christ the Messiah, who is the true Heir and Successor of David, when He comes, shall raise up the kingdom of Judah, being miserably afflicted, destitute, and lost to the eye of the world; He changing it into a spiritual kingdom, shall restore it to a higher glory than ever it had. The crown here was reserved and laid up for the Lord Christ, who was born King of the Jews (Matt. ii. 2); to whom the angel told Mary that the Lord should give the throne of His father David, and that He should reign over the house of Jacob for ever (Luke i. 32, 33). Nathaniel called Him "the King of Israel" (John i. 40). The Father hath appointed Christ to be king of Israel, gave Him power (Is. ix. 6; Micah v. 2). Christ claimed to be such Himself (John v. 22). "And I will give it Him." Christ, when He comes, shall not be kept off from His rights. Though He come in a mean and low way, yet He shall be king and reign.

I. The Lord doth lay the glory of crowns and sceptres in the dust when He pleases. "I will overturn." There is no crown so sure to any mortal's head, no kingdom so stable, but the Lord can pluck away the crown, shake the kingdom to pieces, throw out the possessors, and dispossess their heirs. Sometimes the Lord doth suddenly overturn empires and kingdoms (Dan. v. 30, 31); sometimes He proceeds gradually as with the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. "I will be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness. A moth eats up a garment by degrees, now it makes one hole in it, and anon another; so rottenness enters by degrees into a tree, first into one branch, then another, after into the body and root. So God, by degrees, wasted and consumed these kingdoms. Be it suddenly or gradually, He overturns them when He pleases. He breaks the staves of the wicked, and the sceptres of the rulers (Isa. xiv. 5).

II. When God overturns crowns and kingdoms He keeps those in such a condition while he pleases. "And it shall be no more, until He come, whose right it is." This was near 500 years; for from Zedekiah's deposal to the birth of Christ were 492 years, which was a long season for His crown and kingdom to lie in darkness, and a desolate condition. Hosea told us long since that the children of Israel should "abide many days without a king and without a prince" (Hosea iii. 4). The kingdom of Israel was overturned by the hand of God above a hundred years before the kingdom of Judah, and lies overturned to this day; and so hath been above two thousand years in a sad, dark, distressed condition. Their sins were great, which caused the Lord to overturn them, and He lets them lie under the punishment of their iniquity many years. When kingdoms are down, many may strive to lift them up to their former dignity, but it cannot be till the Lord's time come.

III. The Lord Christ; the promised Messiah, was the true King of Judah, and Prince of Zion. "Until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it Him." The Father had appointed Him to be King, given Him the kingdom, and made it known long before His coming in the flesh. He was the Shiloh, the Prosperer, unto whom the gathering of the people should be; He gathered Jews and Gentiles together. He was spoken of as the "Star of Jacob," and the "Sceptre" who "should rise out of Israel" (Num. xxiv. 17). In many other places of Scripture, the kingdom of Christ, His right thereunto, and the Father's donation thereof unto Him are spoken of. The people's hearts were towards Him, and they would have made Him a king (John vi. 15). However He appeared to the world, the Apostles beheld glory and majesty in Him (John i. 14; 2 Pet. i. 16); and Pilate wrote over His head, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (Matt. xxvii. 37). Christ was born a king, died

a king, He lives and reigns at this day King of Zion, and of all saints (Rev. xv. 3).

IV. The wisdom and goodness of the Lord towards His people, that when He tells them of the severest judgment, He mingles some mercy. Though He threatens their Church and State for a long time, yet He tells them of the coming of Christ who should be their king, wear the crown, and raise up the kingdom again. This was a great mercy, in the depth of misery; if they lost an earthly kingdom, they should have a spiritual one; if they lost a profane and temporal king, they should have a king of righteousness, an eternal king. It is the method of the Lord, when He is bringing in dreadful judgments upon His people, that have provoked Him bitterly, to lay in something that may support and comfort those who have served Him faithfully (Amos ix. 8–11). Here is goodness with severity.

V. That how contrary soever God's actings appear, yet He will make good His promises. The Lord had promised to set up His son Christ to be King in Zion, the hill of His holiness (Psa. ii. 6); that the Government should be upon His shoulder (Isa. ix. 6); that He would "cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David, and He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land (Jer. xxxiii. 15). What likelihood was there that these things should be, when the Lord overturns the land, plucks up all by the roots, and lays all in a dead condition, and that for many days and years? They might have thought and said, Surely, this death of the crown, of Church and State, will be the death of all those and other promises; but it was not so. Though a sentence of death was upon the land, upon the Jews, yet the living God kept life in the promises, He remembered them, and said, I will give it to Him, He shall have this land, the kingdom and the crown, He shall sit upon Zion, reign and execute judgment. The actings of God sometimes are such, that to man's apprehensions they will make void the promises of God. In Psa. lxxvii. 7, 8; saith Asaph, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? God's hand was heavy upon him, his soul was greatly afflicted so that he questioned the truth of God's promises, and was ready to despair. But what saith he in the tenth verse, "This was my infirmity." There was no infirmity in God; He had not forgotten His promise, it was not out of His sight, though out of Asaph's. Man's faith may fail him sometimes, but God's faithfulness never fails Him (Psa. lxxxix. 33). God's operations may have an aspect that way; the devil's temptations and our unbelieving hearts may not only make us think so, but persuade us it is so; whereas it cannot be so, for the Lord will not suffer it, He will not make a lie in His truth or faithfulness; so the Hebrew is: He is Truth, and not one of His promises can fail. This must afford strong consolation unto all that are under any promise of God.—*Greenhill.*

(Vers. 18–27.)

Jerusalem's Fall and Rising.

The prophet announces the fall of the temporal sovereignty of David's house in the person of Zedekiah. He declares his message as the word of the Lord, "Exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high" (ver. 26). This may be considered as the principle upon which God acts in His government of mankind throughout all ages. When the mother of our Lord thought of the honour

which had been bestowed upon her, that one so obscure and lowly should be chosen to bring forth the Saviour of the world, she broke forth into a song of praise, saying, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (Luke i. 52). Christ taught the general principle, "Everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke xvii. 14). Even the great French sceptic, Bayle, says of these words, that they contain "the abridgment of all human history." Such is the law of God's kingdom. Jerusalem is to fall, but in due time to be raised to a better and nobler condition. Her true King will come unto her in the person of the Messiah. Her fall is to be unto rising (ver. 27).

I. Jerusalem's fall. 1. *It is portrayed by an enigmatic representation.* The event is now near and the prophet is bidden to portray the judgments which are to fall upon Jerusalem. He draws a symbolic sketch of the siege of the city, representing the advance of Nebuchadnezzar towards it from his own country. The King of Babylon is seen standing on the highway, at a point from which two roads diverge, one leading to Jerusalem, the other to Rabbah. Which road shall he take? He determines his course by augury in three of its branches, employing divination by arrows, by images, and by the appearance of the entrails of a newly killed sacrifice. The omens all point to Jerusalem as the first object of attack. Thus Providence so ordered it that judgment must begin at the house of God. 2. *The threat of it is received with irreverent credulity.* When the Jews hear that the King of Babylon is advancing against Jerusalem they make light of it. They say that the king has been misled by a false divination (ver. 23). They forget that they themselves were deluded by vain divinations and lying prophets (Ezek. xxi. 29; Ex. xiii. 6, 7; xxii. 28). They despise augury when it is against themselves. In their infatuation they cannot read the signs of the times, nor see that their judgment is nigh at hand. They readily take refuge in any interpretation of events which can lend some support to their vain hope. They are blind to the sad facts of their own spiritual condition, which must inevitably draw these judgments upon them. They have the worst omens against them, their iniquities, transgressions, sins (ver. 24); and, more particularly, their treason and perjury (ver. 23). And all this was "discovered" sin, it affected the social and political life of the nation; it appeared before the eyes of all men (ver. 24). 3. *The instrument which was to bring it about was chosen of God.* The human instrument who was to compass the fall of Jerusalem was the King of Babylon, who, in this instance, was God's servant for judgment. Though an heathen king, and one who consulted augury, he was truly an instrument in the hands of God for the correction of His people and for working out His purposes towards mankind. God can guide even men's appeals to chance, and overrule them for His own purpose (Prov. xvi. 33). The Magi, who were worshippers of the hosts of heaven, and who thought that they could read in them the destinies of nations, were yet led to Christ by a star. Apart from all his consultation of omens, the King of Babylon had justice on his side. He was truly a chosen vessel to accomplish God's righteous will concerning Jerusalem. 4. *The blame must be charged upon the Jews themselves.* "Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered" (ver. 24). The King of Babylon must not be charged with their disasters, nor his resorting to divination, but to their own treason and perjury they must impute the blame. It was not their father's sins but their own that brought destruction upon them. 5. *Judgment was inevitable.* "Jerusalem the defenced" (ver. 20) must fall. The measure of her iniquity was full. Justice could forbear no longer. In Zedekiah the iniquity of the nation culminated (ver. 25). In him the sovereignty of David's house came to an end.

II. Jerusalem's rising. In one man Jerusalem fell, but a greater Man shall restore it. The sovereignty of David's house came to an end in Zedekiah, but not for ever. Jerusalem has a future. She shall rise from her ruins in a far more glorious form than that in which she was lost, even as the "Jerusalem which is above, the mother of us all" (Gal. iv. 26). 1. *The rising is to come through the Messiah.* It is not by a doctrine, or a truth, but by a *person* that God will deliver His people. Zedekiah represented the nation in its fall; Christ in its rising. The Messiah is the rightful sovereign of men (ver. 27). He is the true priest, and the true king. All others are but shadows of Him. He alone has the supreme right and power. Among the Israelites the offices of priest and king were jealously separated; but in Christ they can be united with perfect safety, for He is both holy and just. 2. *The deliverance through the Messiah only comes after the complete wreck of the nation's fortunes.* "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more" (ver. 24). This complete destruction issued in that fulness of time in which the Son of Man should come. The Messiah appeared upon the wreck of the world's hopes. Judah's royalty had long been laid in the dust, Greece had long ago fallen, and Rome was fast sinking into decay, when God sent His Son to redeem the world. Men were permitted to make the sad experiment of trying to live without God, in order that they might learn their need of a Redeemer who was the "Desire of all nations."

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — Vers. 28-32. The overthrow of the Ammonites. Israel is to rise after judgment, but Ammon is to be utterly destroyed.

Ver. 28. "Concerning the Ammonites, and concerning their reproach even say thou, the sword, the sword is drawn." "Lest it should be supposed that because Nebuchadnezzar had taken the route to Jerusalem, and not that to Rabbah, therefore the Ammonites should escape being invaded by his army, the prophet is instructed to denounce judgment against them also. The *reproach* with which the Ammonites are here charged, was their opprobrious and insulting treatment of the Hebrews at different periods of their history, and especially when Jerusalem was taken by the Chaldeans."—*(Henderson).* "The children of Ammon represents the world—power hostile to the kingdom of God. Yet the representative is not taken accidentally out of the multitude of the heathen peoples hostile to the kingdom of God; but the prophet takes occasion from the circumstances of the time. Ammon had at that time, no less than Judah, incurred the anger of the Chaldeans, and so it was natural to exemplify in him the general truth, the more natural because the vengeance was first to fall on Judah, while Ammon appeared to come out of the affair with high shoes, and mocked Judah, who had to pay the score. "Their reproval"—the insults which they heaped upon Judah. The prophet forsees that the Ammonites, on the approach of danger, will withdraw from the coalition (Lam. i. 2), and on the catastrophe of Jerusalem, give free course to their ancient hatred against Judah. Judah exchanges the prophecy that was unfavourable to him for the divination (ver. 23), and by this fatal exchange, falls; Ammon exchanges (ver. 29) the divination favourable to him, for the prophecy, and thereby prepares himself at all events, for the downfall."—*(Hengstenberg).*

Ver. 29. "Whiles they see vanity unto thee, whiles they divine a lie unto thee." (Heb). *They have seen falsehood for thee, they have divined for thee a lie.* The Ammonites also had those among them who practised divination. But these had divined a "lie" for them, promising them peace and safety when judgment was hard at hand. "To bring thee upon the

necks of them that are slain." The Ammonites are to be involved in one common ruin with the Jews.

Ver. 30. "I will judge thee in the place where thou wast created." "The Ammonites were not to be carried away captives, like the Jews to Babylon, but were to perish in their own land. While the Jews were to be restored after the captivity had cured them of idolatry, the Ammonitish kingdom was to cease for ever. The prophecy was fulfilled five years after the destruction of Jerusalem."—*(Henderson.)*

Ver. 31. "I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath." The idea is not to blow with fire—which is an unnatural figure—but rather a blowing which increases the intensity of the flame. "Brutish men, and skilful to destroy." "The word must be explained from Psalm xcii. 7, 'brutish,' foolish, always bearing in mind that the Hebrew associated the idea of Godlessness with folly, and that cruelty naturally follows in its train."—*(Keil)*

Ver. 32. "Thou shalt be no more remembered." Ammon was to perish utterly. For her there was no hope of restoration, like that held out to Israel in ver. 27. "From the times of the Maccabees, the Ammonites and Moabites have quite disappeared out of history."—*(Hengstenberg.)*

HOMILETICS.

(Vers. 28, 29).

1. *When God brings judgments upon His people for their iniquities, then their enemies take advantage and revile them.* The Ammonites were glad that the calamity of Jerusalem was at hand. They were neighbours of the Jews, brethren also as coming from the brother of Abraham; yet they reproached the Jews and added affliction to affliction (Zeph. ii. 8). The rabbies say, that when the Chaldeans carried the Jews captive, through the land of the Ammonites and Moabites, the Jews wept, and they reproached them saying, why do ye afflict yourselves? Why do you weep? Are you not going to your father's house? They meant Chaldea, which was Abraham's country and habitation. These and many other reproachful speeches they used against the Jews, when they were spoiled and led into capitivity, and "magnified themselves against their border." They said, now their border—their land—should become theirs. Thus they reproached and wronged the Jews. So likewise did the Edomites in "the day of Jerusalem" (Ps. cxxxvii. 7), that was in the day when Nebuchadnezzar's force took and plundered it. They cried, "Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation." The adversaries saw Jerusalem, and did mock at her Sabbaths; they scoffed at all her festivals, religion, and worship. Where is your God, whose days you have so religiously observed? Why did He not defend you from this day of your sufferings? Either He was infirm, and could not, or unfaithful, and would not. 2. *The Lord takes notice of the enemies reproaching His people.* He tells the prophet of the reproachings of the Ammonites. Ezekiel was in Babylon, and knew nothing of it, but God heard and observed it (Zeph. ii. 8). God saith in His indignation unto Moab, "Was not Israel a derision unto Thee?" Deny it, if thou darest. I saw it; I heard it. This is some comfort to the Church and people of God, that He observes not only the wrongs wicked men do unto His people, but also the reproaching speeches they utter against them (Lam. iii. 6.) 3. *Reproaching and reviling God's people, when they are in affliction, draws judgments upon the reproachers and revilers.*

The Ammonites reproached the Jews when the Babylonish sword came upon them, and here the prophet must tell them the sword is drawn and furbished for slaughter. Reproach of this kind is a provoking sin; God's name, truth, ordinances, suffer when His people are reproached for His correcting hand upon them for their iniquities. Moab for reproaching should be reproached; yea, grievously afflicted, yea, utterly destroyed. 4. *When the Lord threatens sinful nations with sore judgments, they have those amongst them which divert them from the truth, possess them with delusions, and put them upon destructive practices.* The Ammonites were threatened here with the Babylonish sword, but they neither believed Ezekiel nor Jeremiah, who told them the same thing. Their false prophets, their diviners, beat them off from it, possessed them with vanities and lies, put them upon insulting over the Jews when the hand of the Lord was most heavy upon them, and so brought them to suffer by the same sword the Jews did. It is just with God to give men and nations over to believe lies and lying prophets, which shall lead them to destruction, when they have stopped their ears against the true prophets. Ahab would not believe Micaiah, but the false prophets who spake words according to his mind; but they were vanity, lies and he smarted for it (1 Kings xxii.) 5. *Though the Lord bears long with sinful nations, yet He hath His days and times of reckoning with them.* The day of the Jews was come, and their iniquity had an end. The day of the Ammonites came, and their iniquity had an end. God punished them severely for their sins (Ezekiel xxv.) Babylon and its king had a time to sin and a time to suffer. God stayed many days, yet had His day, and came at the day appointed (Jer. l. 31; li. 13). Babylon was insatiably covetous, robbing the nations of their riches, but all her wealth could not purchase one day's respite from the wrath of God, nor all her waters preserve her from the fire of His indignation The fire God sent in His day burnt up their habitations, and licked up the water of Euphrates whereon Babylon sat. God bare long with us, and the nations about us, but His day is come, He is visiting; we, they, have had our times of sinning, and must now have our times of suffering.—*(Greenhill.)*

The Sins of Jerusalem and Israel: The General Corruption of Prophets, Priests, Princes, and People (Chap. xxii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—We have here another description of the sins of Jerusalem and Israel; and thus the judgments predicted in the last chapter are clearly justified. Three words of God are here, closely connected together in their substance and design, viz.: (1) The blood-guiltiness and idolatry of Jerusalem hastening the coming of the day of retribution, when the city will be an object of scorn to all nations (vers. 1–16). (2) The house of Israel has become dross, and is doomed to be melted in the fire of God's righteous anger (vers. 17–22). (3) All ranks of the kingdom—prophets, priests, princes and people have become utterly corrupt, and therefore the threatened judgments are inevitable.

This chapter may be considered as standing in contrast with Chap. xx. In this latter, the whole of Israel's history was reviewed as revealing a growing corruption which must of necessity bring down God's judgments upon the people. The present chapter describes the existing condition of Jerusalem. In one case the prophet was commanded to "Make them to know the abominations of their fathers" (ch. xx. 4); in the other, he is commanded concerning Jerusalem to "Make her to know her abominations" (ver. 2).

Ver. 2. "Wilt thou judge the bloody city?" The same expression as in chap. xx. 4, denoting that the prophet's reproof still continues. The question

implies the idea that judgment can wait no longer, and the prophet must be wakened up to realise fully the great iniquity of his nation.

Ver. 3. "**The city sheddeth blood in the midst of it.**" "On account of the murders committed in Jerusalem and the offering of children in sacrifice to Moloch, she might well be denominated 'the bloody city.' In this respect she rivalled Nineveh (Nah. iii. 1), and might justly anticipate the same doom. Instead of deriving any advantage from their idolatries, they were only involved thereby in ruin" (*Henderson*). "**That her time may come.**" The limit of her probation—the crisis of judgment (Isa. xiii. 22; Ezek. xxx. 3). "**Maketh idols against herself to defile herself.**" By her persistence in iniquity still heaping upon herself moral defilement with all its consequences.

Ver. 4. "**Thou hast caused thy days to draw near, and art come even unto thy years.**" The full term of days and years when the limit of Divine patience shall be reached. "The Jewish commentators distinguish between the 'days' and the 'years' here mentioned, interpreting the former of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and the latter of the captivity in Babylon" (*Henderson*). "**A reproach unto the heathen, and a mocking to all countries.**" "Defiled, unclean with regard to the name, *i.e.* having forfeited the name of a holy city through capital crimes and other sinful abominations." —(*Keil.*)

Ver. 5. "**Those that be near**" (Heb.). "The women that be near." The cities of the nations are personified; as in Ezek. xxiii. 48. "**Infamous and much vexed**" (Heb.). "Polluted in name, much in vexation." Her ancient renown had now descended to the dust. She that had been once "great among nations" (Lam. i. 1) had now only a pre-eminence in calamity and disgrace. "Formerly Jerusalem had been renowned as 'the holy city.' Now it had been defiled by every kind of crime. It was also tumultuous, *great of confusion*, from the seditions and violence which obtained among the inhabitants. To all, both far and near, the Jewish metropolis was to be an object of derision."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 6. "**To their power.**" Heb. "To his own arm." Each man adopted the principle that might was right. With each man the strength of his own arm was his god. "Instead of reigning according to law and justice, the princes of Judah, in the most despotic manner, crushing by the strong arm of power all who were the objects of their personal displeasure." —(*Henderson*). "**To shed blood.**" "By the repetition of the refrain, to shed blood (vers. 6, 9 and 12), the enumeration is divided into three groups of sins, which are placed in the category of blood-guiltiness by the fact that they are preceded by this sentence and the repetition of it after the form of a refrain. The first group (vers. 6–8) embraces sins which are committed in daring opposition to all the laws of morality. By the princes of Israel we are to understand primarily the profligate kings who caused innocent persons to be put to death, such for example, Jehoiakim (2 Kings xxiv. 4), Manasseh (2 Kings xxi. 16), and others. In the second group (verses 9–11), in addition to slander and idolatry, the crimes of lewdness and incest are the principal sins for which the people are reproved, and here the allusion to Lev. xviii. and xix. is very obvious. The third group (ver. 12) is composed of sins of covetousness. For the first clause, compare the prohibition in Ex. xxiii. 2; for the second, Ezekiel xviii., 8, 13. The reproof finishes with forgetfulness of God, which is closely allied to covetousness.—(*Keil*).

Ver. 9. "**Men that carry tales to shed blood.**" Heb. "Men of traffic." Describing those who travelled about for the purposes of trade, such as pedlars or wandering merchants. Men of

this kind would be likely to become notorious for carrying reports from place to place. Hence the phrase came to be used in the sense of *talebearers*. In the present instance, the reference is plainly to a class of men whom, in the present day, we should call *informers*. "They eat upon the mountains." See "Exegetical Notes," (ch. xviii. 6.)

Ver. 10. "**Discovered their father's nakedness.**" Mother, or step-mother; (*Comp.* Lev. xviii. 7, 8; xx. 11; 1 Cor. ver. 1.) "**Set apart for pollution.**" "This suggests the idea of a female devoted to prostitution, whereas all that the Hebrew expresses is one that is unclean by reason of the menstrual discharge. The character of the Jews, as here described, is aptly given by Tacitus: 'projectissima ad libidinem gens, alienarum concubitu abstinent, inter se nihil illicitum' (Hist. lib. v. cap. 5)" (*Henderson.*)

Ver. 11. "**And one hath committed abomination with his neighbour's wife: and another . . . and another, &c.**" "There were such cases! Impurity in every form. A specimen of the moral atmosphere as a whole (Ezek. xviii. 6; Lev. xviii. 15; xx. 12; 2 Sam. xiii. 12."—*(Lange.)*

Ver. 12. "**Taken gifts to shed blood.**" "Gifts,"—the word is here used in the sense of bribes. "**Hast forgotten Me, saith the Lord God.**" "The crowning sin with which the Jews are charged, and that which is strictly speaking the source of all sin, is forgetfulness of God. It is only as God is kept out of view as the omnipresent, omniscient, holy and righteous Governor of the world, that sin can be indulged in" *(Henderson.)* Two of their prophets describe forgetfulness of God as the root of all their evil (Deut. xxxii. 18; Jer. iii. 21.

Ver. 13. "**I have smitten Mine hand at thy dishonest gain.**" A gesture figuratively describing God's wrathful indignation. "This verse is closely connected with the preceding. This serves to explain the fact that the only sins mentioned as exciting the wrath of God are coveteousness and blood-guiltiness" (*Keil*).

Ver. 14. "**Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee?**" The courage of sinners must fail when the judgment of God reckons with them.

Ver. 15. "**And will consume thy filthiness out of thee.**" "The removal of the uncleanness of Jerusalem is effected by the extirpation of the sinful inhabitants" *(Hengstenberg)*. "The object to be attained by the dispersion of the Jews was their recovery from idolatry and from the polluting influences which followed in its train."—(*Henderson*).

Ver. 16. "**Thou shalt take thine inheritance in thyself in the sight of the heathen.**" "The only translation of these words, which suits the connection, is that given in the margin of the common version: *and thou shalt be profaned in thyself*. The meaning appears to be: thou shalt be inwardly conscious of thy polluted condition, and shalt loathe thyself on account of thy sins. There, among the heathen, thou shalt learn to appreciate my character as a God of holiness, righteousness, and truth" *(Henderson)*. "Jerusalem has desecrated the sanctuaries of the Lord (ver. 8); therefore shall it also be desecrated for a requital (ver. 16). It has wickedly insulted the dignity of God; for this it must suffer the loss of its own dignity. 'In thee,' so that thou must experience in thyself the desecration; whereas before thou didst send it forth from thee. Such things always return to him from whom they proceed."—*(Hengstenberg)*.

HOMILETICS.

The Catalogue of Jerusalem's Sins.

I. Consider the sins in detail. The prophet is not now speaking of the sins of their forefathers, but of those of his own day. They were all "abominations" in the sight of God (ver. 2), corrupting and daring sins which bring down God's judgment swiftly upon nations. 1. *Blood guiltiness.* Jerusalem is called "The bloody city" (vers. 3, 4, 6, 9, 12). To be guilty of another's blood is the highest offence which a man can commit against his fellow. When this crime becomes the characteristic of a nation, that nation sinks into a savage and degraded condition. 2. *Idolatry.* "Maketh idols against herself to defile herself" (ver. 3). In forsaking the worship of the true God they taxed their own powers of invention, and this was a greater wickedness than merely adopting the errors and superstitions which had been handed down to them. 3. *Destruction of the fundamental idea of justice.* "To their power to shed blood" (ver. 6). As the Heb. has it, *to his own arm*, i.e., each man made his own strength the rule of right, made of his arm a god. The notion that might is right destroys the very foundations of justice. 3. *Disregard of parental authority* (ver. 7). The Family is the oldest institution, the most changeless, and it will outlast all others. When the essential laws of the Family are disregarded, the Nation must decay and perish. 4. *Oppression of the suffering and defenceless.* The stranger, the fatherless, and the widow (ver. 7). 5. *Profanation of God's ordinances.* They profaned the sanctuary and the Sabbath (ver. 8). 6. *Bearing false witness.* "Men that carry tales to shed blood" (ver 9). Base informers and slanderers who scrupled not for their own wicked ends to swear men's lives away. The fact that there were such men in considerable numbers suggests that there must also have been wicked rulers and judges who encouraged such men. 7. *Impurity* (ver. 10-11). The individual was corrupted, then the family, and, last of all, the state. God sees such sins when man sees them not. Vices of this kind impair the physical energy of nations, and if unchecked must bring them to destruction. 8. *Covetousness.* This spirit of covetousness led them to take bribes, to become usurers, and extortioners. Thus those in authority became corrupted, and the evil spread fast throughout the whole nation. Jewish tradition ascribes the destruction of Jerusalem to covetousness, that being regarded as the root of all evil.

II. Consider these sins in their root-principles. 1. *Forgetfulness of God.* "And hast forgotten Me, saith the Lord God" (ver. 12). Former prophets had reminded them that this forgetfulness of God was the bitter root out of which all their evils grew (Deut. xxxii. 18; Jer. iii. 21). Whatever was good or great in this people arose from their connection with God, so that by forsaking His worship and service they cut themselves off from a glorious past. They who forsake God are bound to follow evil. The morality of a nation cannot be preserved, even by the best rules and resolutions, if the truths of God and immortality are rejected.

> "Truth for truth and good for good! Be good. The true, the pure, the just—
> Take the charm for ever from them and they crumble into dust."
> (*Tennyson:* "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After.")

2. *Selfishness.* Having cast off God, each man made himself the centre of all interest, the rule of all duty. Hence covetousness, leading to extortion, oppression, and the taking of bribes, the consequent perversion of justice to the injury of the poor and defenceless. Hence the deification of force—the doctrine that might was right. In such a condition of things each man will

regard that which is a benefit to himself as right and good. Whatever a man could get by force would be his, and he would have no right to it longer than he had strength to defend it. Such a doctrine as this would destroy the foundations of morality. 3. *Sensuality.* This was another root-principle of the nation's evil. The animal nature was let loose without restraint, and sins were committed which sank men lower than the beast. These sins are described (ver. 10) by such words as "abomination," "lewdness," "defiling" and "humbling" those whose chastity they were bound in honour to respect.

III. Consider these sins in their punishment. "I will scatter thee among the heathen, and disperse thee in the countries" (ver. 15). This punishment included many afflictions. 1. *The sorrows and dangers of exile.* They had to leave their beautiful country with all its hallowed asssociations, their homes, their kindred, their religious privileges which had made them great. They would learn to realize the worth of these when once they had lost them. 2. *Abandonment of their own evil principles.* They were permitted to carry out their own evil principles. They had acted like the heathen, and now they shall learn what heathenism means, in its own proper home. God allows men to work out such experiments for themselves; if haply they may come, at length, to the knowledge of their own helplessness. The discipline of failure prepares the way for the glory of God's salvation. The prodigal in the parable thought that he could better himself elsewhere. He is allowed to make the trial, he gets his portion and departs. By the smart of the experiment he is brought to a better mind. Hard experience taught him those lessons which the sober convictions of duty failed to teach. Those who refuse to learn by God's precepts shall learn by His judgments. 3. *They would be a reproach among the heathen.* The heathen could only despise them for their folly and inconsistency. They would be "a mocking to all countries" (ver. 4.) They would witness how great her fall from ancient renown, and point at her the finger of scorn when she had now only the pre-eminence in calamity. 3. *The judgments would be severe and effectual.* "And will consume thy filthiness out of thee" (ver. 15). The trial by fire is the hardest and most searching of all trials. We can, therefore, only understand this threatening to mean the extinction of Jerusalem's polluted inhabitants. The ungodly are to be separated from the righteous. What a suggestion of the final judgment! 4. *No human power could avert the judgment, or courage resist it.* "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee?" (ver 14). When sin is committed men imagine themselves strong and full of courage, but how different their bearing when the time of judgment comes! When God once rises up in judgment against sinners. heart and hand, courage and strength fail. There was now no way of escape for the guilty. He against whom they had sinned had uttered His word, and it must be fulfilled to the utmost in dire judgment; "I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it" (ver. 14). 5. *The agency of man in the judgment.* "Son of man, wilt thou judge the bloody city?" (ver. 2). The prophets of old judged the world through the word of the Lord, the apostles through the Holy Spirit convincing the world of sin. St. Paul tells us that "the saints shall judge the world" (1 Cor. vi. 2); by which we are, to understand, not that they shall sit upon the judgment seat, but rather that they by their righteousness shall condemn those who having the same opportunities yet resisted the grace of God.

(Vers. 14–16).

1. *Sinners are apt to confide in their wisdom, strength, power, riches, or friends.* Jerusalem thought that she had wherewith to keep off all judgments, or sufficient to enable her to wrestle with them if they came. "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong?" Jerusalem thought so, had confidence

that way, else the Lord would not have put these questions to her. "Thou didst trust in thy beauty" (Ezek. xvi. 15); in thy wealth, in thy walls, in thy soldiers, in thy counsellors, in thy temple, in thy mountains, which were thy beauty. In Jeremiah's days it is evident that the wise, the rich, and strong men in Jerusalem did too much confide and glory in their wisdom, their riches, and strength (Jer. ix. 23). Her confidence was in falsehood (Jer. xiii. 25); that was in things which proved false and deceitful: one of this kind was the Egyptian strength (Isa. xxx. 2; Ezek. xvii. 17). It is not good to lean on our own wisdom, to rest upon our own strength, or strength of others; whoever makes flesh within, or flesh without, his arm, lies under a curse (Jer. xvii. 5); but he that trusts in the Lord, and in Him only, he hath the blessing (Jer. xvii. 7). 2. *God hath His times to reckon with sinners.* To make them smart for their evil doings. "In the days that I shall deal with thee." God had His day to deal with Egypt (Ezek. xxx. 9), with the Midianites (Isa. ix. 4). Ahab had his day to do wickedly, and God had His day to deal with him (1 Kings xxii. 34, 35). Men sin, and think to hear no more of their sins, but God remembers them, and hath His days to visit for them (Rom. ii. 6, 9). 3. *God's judgments discover the vanity and rottenness of human confidences.* "Can thine heart endure? can thine hands be strong?" In the days when I shall deal with thee, when I shall bring the sword, plague and famine, thy heart will be faint and thy hands feeble. God's judgments are fires which consume man's confidences, and make them see their own weakness. If footmen, horsemen, and the swellings of Jordan weary and sink men, what will the Lord of Hosts do (Jer. xii. 5)? If they cannot bear the lesser judgments, how will they bear the greater? If briars and thorns conceit themselves to be oaks and cedars, can they endure the fire? They will be burnt to ashes (Isa. xxvii. 4). 4. *The word of the Lord shall take place, whatever men's thoughts are.* They thought Nebuchadnezzar would not come, or if he did, that they and the Egyptians should be able to deal with them, and prevent those evils which were threatened by the prophets; but "I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it." Neither will the Lord revoke what He hath said, and so prevent judgments intended: "He is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back His words" (Isa. xxxi. 2). Men often speak, threaten, and then after eat their words, call back their threatenings, saying they were uttered in passion, inconsiderately, and so show their folly; but God when He speaks, it is in wisdom, His words shall stand, and not be removed or called back (Amos vi. 11). Hence it is that the Lord saith, "They shall know whose word shall stand, mine or theirs" (Jer. xliv. 28). 5. *The Lord by His judgment doth purge out of cities and nations the wicked, and makes them and their wickedness to cease.* "I will consume thy filthiness out of thee," *i.e.*, thy filthy ones. God brought the sword, famine, and pestilence upon Jerusalem, and by these did cut off and consume the filthy ones there (Jer. xiv. 15; xvi. 4; Ezek. viii. 14). By His judgments the Lord consumes the filthy out of the city and land, and filthiness out of the saints. 6. *The wickedness of God's people doth disinterest them in God; it makes God disown them, and leave them to themselves.* They might think and say they were still the people, the "inheritance" of God, that they had an interest in Him; but "thou shalt take thine inheritance in thyself;" I disclaim thee, I cast thee off as profane, and look upon thee no otherwise than I do upon heathens. Israel had cast off the thing that was good, viz., the worship of God (Hos. viii. 3); and, therefore, the prophet said, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off" (Hos. viii. 5); that is, thy false worship hath made Me to cast thee off, to declare thee to be none of my city, and thy people to be none of mine. The prophet Jeremiah tells us, that the Jews were once very dear to God, even as dear as a wife can be to a husband; but because, like lions, they carried it stoutly against God, and cried out against Him and His prophets, therefore He forsook

them, and gave them into the hands of the Babylonians; and because Jerusalem was as a "speckled bird" in the eye of God, through her variety of gods, altars, superstitions and idolatries, therefore God caused the birds of all the nations to hoot at and hate her, even as birds do a speckled bird, inviting them and all the beasts of the field to come and devour her. And all this because they dealt treacherously, they were hypocritical, they were wicked (Jer. xii. 1, 2, 4, 7–9). The Jews had been a people precious in the sight of God, and honourable (Isa. xliii. 4); Jerusalem His habitation, and the people of it His inheritance and His glory, whom He protected (Isa. iv. 5); yet, by their sins they provoked God, so that He gave "His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand" (Psa. lxxviii. 61). 7. *That God's judgments bring people to the knowledge of God.* God would scatter them, consume them, cast them off, leave them to themselves, and they should know that he is the Lord. "The Lord is known by executing judgments" (Psa. ix. 16); His power, His justice, and sovereignty are known thereby, and so men are made to fear and stand in awe of Him. When God is silent, and speaks not by His judgments, men think He is like themselves (Psa. l. 21); and are emboldened to sin (Eccl. viii. 11); but when God thunders by His judgments, they have other apprehensions of Him (1 Sam. vi. 19, 20).—*(Greenhill).*

(Vers. 17–22.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Jerusalem besieged by her enemies is the furnace in which God will refine His people Israel.

Ver. 17. "The word of the Lord came unto me." "This second word of God rests, no doubt, upon the figure in ver. 15, of the uncleanness or dirt of sin; but it is not an exposition of the removal of the dirt as predicted there. For that was to be effected through the dispersion of Israel among the nations, whereas the word of God, from ver. 17 onwards, represents the siege awaiting Jerusalem as a melting process, through which God will separate the silver ore contained in Israel from the baser metals mingled with it."—*(Keil.)*

Ver. 18. "The house of Israel is to Me become dross; all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver." Some kinds of silver ore contain a large amount of copper, iron, and lead, with other impurities. The inhabitants of Judea are described as a mass of the baser metals intermixed with the impure residue of silver. The good silver had been drained out of Judah by death or exile, and those who remained had altogether become a compound of wickedness.

Ver. 20. "So will I gather you in Mine anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you." "The smelting is treated here simply as a figurative representation of punishment, and consequently the result of the smelting, namely, the refining of the silver by the removal of the baser ingredients, is not referred to any further, as is the case in Isa. i. 22, 25; Jer. vi. 27–30; Mal. iii. 2, 3. This smelting process was experienced by Israel in the last siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans."—*(Keil).* "In the spiritual department, the silver may become altogether dross. The *furnace* is Jerusalem, according to its destination to serve for a smelting pot. Dross of silver is silver that has become dross. They are all gathered into Jerusalem (ver. 19), as the people far and wide, under the pressure of the foe, seek refuge in the fortified city. In the whole section the judgment is regarded not in the light of purification, but in that of destruction, as Ezekiel usually considers the population of Jerusalem as an ungodly multitude doomed to be extirpated."—*(Hengstenberg).*

Ver. 22. "As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace." "In modern metallurgy, lead is employed for the purpose of purifying silver from other mineral products. The alloy is mixed with lead exposed to fusion upon an earthen vessel, and submitted to a blast of air. By this means the dross is consumed. This process is called the cupelling operation, with which the description in Ezek. xxii. 18–22 accurately coincides. The vessel containing the alloy is surrounded by the fire, or placed in the midst of it, and the blowing is not applied to the fire but to the fused metals. And when this is done, nothing but the perfect metals, gold and silver, can resist the scorifying influence. In Jer. vi. 28–30, we have a perfect description of this process. If we take silver having the impurities in it described in the text, namely, iron, copper and tin, and mix it with lead, and place it in the fire upon a cupell, it soon melts; the lead will oxidize and form a thick, coarse crust upon the surface and thus consume away, but effecting no purifying influence. The alloy remains, if anything, worse than before. The silver is not refined because 'the bellows were burned,' there existed nothing to blow upon it."—*(Smith's Dict. of the Bicle, art. "Lead").*

HOMILETICS.

God has a threefold smelting furnace. 1. *Of sin.* In which one can become dross. 2. *Of trial.* In which furnace the silver is tested. 3. *Of judgment.* In which even the dross is consumed.—*Lange.*

1. *Churches and states may degenerate from their preciousness and purity, into vileness and profaneness.* "It was full of judgment, and righteousness lodged in it" (Isa. i. 21-23), but instead of these, now there was oppression and murder. "Thy silver is become dross, thy wine is mixed with water." Thy money is counterfeit, and thy wine corrupt. Whatever was pure in thee is now corrupted, the law is corrupted with false expositions, the worship is corrupted with idols and human traditions, justice is corrupted with bribery and cruel oppressions, chastity and sobriety are corrupted with lewd and unclean practices. Rome was once a golden city for her faith and holiness (Rom. i. 8; xvi. 19); but now is so corrupt in doctrine, worship, and manners, that she is become "the mother of harlots and abominations" (Rev. xvii. 5). The Seven Churches were once golden candlesticks, but through their corruptions and weaknesses, they soon degenerated into dross. 2. *Men professing godliness, and living ungodlily, are not acceptable to God, nor fit materials of a church.* "The house of Israel is to Me become dross;" they profess My name, and so judge themselves good silver; but they live wickedly, and to Me they are no better than dross, than brass, tin, iron and lead, too base materials to make a temple for Me to dwell in, or a candlestick for Me to set a prophetical light in. Whatever profession they make, whatever parts or privileges they have, they are no silver, but the dross, the excrements of silver, which defile, disgrace the name, the Church, the ordinances of God, and must be separated from the gold and silver (2 Cor. vi. 17). Many that appear silver unto men will be found dross unto God. Hypocrites and wicked ones are dross; only hypocrites are the "dross of silver." 3. *The greatest part of professors, when they come to the trial, will be found corrupt and naught.* "All they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace." The furnace discovered them to be base metal. The number of sincere and silver-like Christians will be few. 4. *Those who degenerate from God and His ways shall meet with fury and fire from the Lord* (ver. 21). When the church of Ephesus decayed in her first love, that of Pergamos turned aside to the

doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes, that of Thyatira to the teachings and seductions of Jezebel; when Sardis abated in her zeal, and Laodicea became lukewarm, the Lord threatened them severely, and at last brake the candlesticks, and put out the lights (Rev. ii. iii.). God will put away all the wicked of the earth from Him like dross (Psa. cxix. 119). 5. *Melting and consuming judgments upon a people are the wrath of God, whoever be the executioners thereof.* Nebuchadnezzar should besiege Jerusalem, and make it like a furnace to melt and consume the Jews, and this the Lord owns to be His doing (ver. 22). The enemies of Jerusalem were but the vials or vessels by which the fury of God was poured out.—(*Greenhill.*)

(Vers. 23-31.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The corrupt condition of all ranks of the people as the immediate cause of the destruction of the kingdom.

Ver. 24. "**Thou art the land that is not cleansed.**" The *priests*, whose office it was to keep the land free from moral and ceremonial defilement had neglected their duty (Lev. xvi. 19). The whole land had become corrupt, but Jerusalem was to be regarded as a concentration of the iniquity of the whole land. "**Nor rained upon in the day of indignation**" Heb. "that hath not her rain." The rain which was her proper portion which ought to have fallen upon her. By this rain is signified, the gentle, sanctifying showers of the prophetic word (Deut. xxxii. 2). The blame of this desolate state of things is imputed to the *prophets* who were utterers of vain speeches and lying visions (ver. 28). "A land that has no rain in the day of indignation, is a land that in the outburst of the divine judgment finds no grace, and simply, as the connection shows, because its impurity is not removed. The rain in the day of indignation would be a benefit. It would quench the flame of the divine indignation. To the indignation, the full energy of which is here called forth by the uncleanness, may be applied that which is said in the Song of Songs (viii. 7) of the fire of love. 'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the rivers drown it.'"—(*Hengstenberg*).

Ver. 25. "**A conspiracy of her prophets.**" These professed to be the messengers of God but they were conspiring against Him. They were His enemies, even as roaring lions are the enemies of their prey. "The false prophets are first singled out; on account of the greater influence which they exerted in seducing the people by their impious teachings. Not satisfied with each propagating error within his own sphere, they had formed a complot to oppose the messages of the servants of the Lord. Thus forming a powerful body, they resembled a roaring lion, tearing in pieces his prey. Unconcerned about the welfare of the souls of whom they professedly had the cure, and intent only upon their own gain, they had occasioned the death of those who perished in the war with the Chaldeans, and thus increased the number of widows."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 26. "**Her priests have violated My law, and have profaned Mine holy things.**" The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and give it out as from a pure fountain (Mal. ii. 7). But these did violence to God's law, both by breaking it themselves and making it void to others by false interpretations. "**They have put no difference between the holy and profane.**" The priests also knowingly admitted persons to God's sacred ordinances, without any regard or discrimination as to their moral or spiritual fitness for partaking of them. They showed utter indifference to all moral distinctions—right and wrong, pure and impure. Upon them lies the woe pronounced upon those who call evil good, and good evil (Isa. v. 20). "**Have hid their eyes from My Sabbaths.**" They neither observe the

Sabbath themselves, and shut their eyes to the desecration of it by others. Thus they failed to carry out the chief command and reason of their office, which (as laid down by Moses) was "to teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord had spoken unto them." (Lev. x. 11). "The law of the Sabbath is given as an example. This they rob of its deep spiritual import, and limit it to the external rest, as if it were given for animals, and not for men, who are to serve God in spirit. Because they thus let down the commandments of God to the level of man, and make them minister to human inclination, God Himself is desecrated by them. "I am profaned among them." In place of the dread and holy God, who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, appears a lax and sin-favouring god, who creates no one, and is glad if any one will only acknowledge him, and is thankful for every bow that is made to him"—*(Hengstenberg).*

Ver. 27. "Her princes . . . . . like wolves ravening the prey." The term "princes" is applied generally to all the political authorities and officials. These, in their rapacity are compared to wolves, which are noted for their fierceness and cruelty.

Ver. 28. "Her prophets have daubed them with untempered morter." "Them," *i.e.*, the princes. These were prophets who meddled with political matters, and upheld the princes in their iniquity. "The false prophets recur here once more, as abettors of the nobles, to whom they hold out deliverance, and thereby confirm them in their shameful course, instead of vehemently testifying against their sins, and setting before them the judgments of God. In ch. xiii. 10 we have an example of the manner in which the prophets daubed with this untempered mortar. The building of the wall by the people denotes the political activity whereby they sought to raise themselves up—the effort made by the coalition. The false prophets daubed this wall; they gave to the impious and the ungodly movement of the people, that was condemned by the word of the true prophets, the appearance of a higher sanction, and confirmed them in it. The wall is a spiritual one, and so the absurdity suits it as a spiritual mortar. The attempt to put, instead of the spiritual, a material mortar, has arisen only from the want of capacity in expositors to understand the interchange of figure and reality. Nothing can be more absurd than to announce safety to a people living in sin, and to promise success to counsels that are in open contradiction to the revealed counsels of God" *(Hengstenberg)*. These false prophets assured the princes that the King of Babylon would not take Jerusalem, in direct contradiction to the Word of God.

Ver. 29. "The people of the land." "As placed here immediately after the classification of persons holding office, we are to understand the inhabitants generally without distinction of rank or office. Corruption had spread downwards through the whole mass of the community (Jer. v. 1–4). They 'vexed the poor and needy,' they 'oppressed the stranger wrongfully.' So far from encouraging, by their kindness and holy example, those foreigners who sojourned among them to devote themselves in spirit and truth to the service of Jehovah, the Jews did everything that was calculated to alienate them from His worship."—*(Henderson.)*

Ver. 30. "I sought for a man among them . . . but I found none." "Jeremiah, by his powerful preaching of repentance, presented himself as such a public deliverer; but they despised him, and he could gain no position. The man alone is nothing. The position must be added, and the people must gather around him."—*(Hengstenberg.)* It was expressly forbidden to Jeremiah to intercede for them (Jer. xi. 14).

Ver. 31. "Their own way have I recompensed upon their heads." Thus the words of Ezek. xviii. 30 are fulfilled. They are punished for their own personal transgressions, and not for those of their fathers.

HOMILETICS.

The Corruption of the Nation.

I. It was spread through all ranks and classes. 1. *Prophets.* "They have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof" (ver. 25). They were the enemies of God and of the souls which He had made. By their lying prophecies they brought the judgment of the sword upon the city, so that she was rifled of her treasure and her widows were multiplied. 2. *Priests.* Her priests violated God's law; not only by breaking it themselves, but by putting false interpretations on it for the purpose of their own selfish ends. They were ordained to promote holiness, but they put no difference between the holy and the profane, between the unclean and the clean. They destroyed the very foundations of religion and morality. They profaned the blessed ordinance of the sabbath, which God had given to men for rest and worship, and which was wonderfully suited to nourish the growth of religion by promoting serious thought and meditation (ver. 26). 3. *Rulers.* These no longer ruled by righteousness, but shed blood and destroyed souls to get dishonest gain. And the prophets were linked with them, upholding them in their iniquity (ver. 27, 28). 4. *People.* These could not be expected to be better than their guides. There was not a man to be found among them to stand in the gap, and to save the land by his righteousness (ver. 30). We are reminded how when God sent His son, He was rejected by all these classes in succession,—by the religious teachers, then by the rulers, and, last of all, by the people.

II. We can trace the cause and progress of it. The prophets were utterers of lying visions and spurious oracles. Their object was only to flatter the civil authorities for their own selfish purposes. The priests had lost all sense of sacredness. 1. *The decay of a nation's life begins when false doctrines are promulgated.* The history of the children of Israel was the history of religion. They were what they were because of certain doctrines and ordinances concerning God, and His service, and human duty. These were revealed to them from heaven. They were bound by solemn obligations to obey them. And God's law is violated just as much by putting false interpretations upon it as by actual transgression. False doctrines are not immaterial. They are not mere errors of the head,—harmless speculations having no real influence upon life and duty. For it will be found that what is wrong in doctrine springs from the fountain of an evil heart. False doctrines are on the side of the passions. They are human inventions to justify the errors of heart and life. A right life must have right principles for its foundation. If we examine the errors of Popery, we find that they have their origin in corrupt human nature. They have an eye to political ascendancy, to the supremacy of a priestly class, to gain, to worldly ambitions, and to salve the consciences of men by easy and convenient methods of dealing with sin. True teaching concerning God and human duty can alone promote holiness of heart and life, which is the salt of nations to preserve them from corruption and decay. 2. *The decay of a nation's life also sets in when its rulers are no longer governed by conscience.* When they set aside God's law of righteousness, and are intent only upon dishonest gain, then they become oppressors of the poor and defenceless, and scruple not to shed innocent blood. 3. *The decay of a nation's life is imminent*

when priests become mere courtiers. When they flatter those in power, with the view only of advancing themselves. Corruptions of this kind soon followed when Rome embraced the Christian religion under Constantine, by which the clergy acquired political importance. The temptation to worldly ambition was strong, and they yielded to it. They sought to please princes in order to promote the temporal interests of the Church and their own wealth and grandeur. And when princes and priests are corrupted it is no marvel that the evil influence at length affects public opinion. When the reigning powers and public opinion are on the side of tyranny and wrong, corruption must find its way even to the seat of justice. Instead of equity we have caprice and irrational and unjust maxims and practices. And corruption in all these departments soon spreads into family life, and thus the last retreat of a nation's strength and purity is invaded.

III. It brought sure judgment. The dire judgments which fell upon the people were inevitable. They happened by a moral necessity God had done everything for His vineyard that could be done in it, and there remained nothing more to be tried. 1. *The ministry of the true prophets had failed.* The people had been instructed and warned. When God's teaching by the mouth of His holy prophets does no good, then have the people judged themselves. When Jerusalem killed the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto her, then her house was left unto her desolate. "Your house," said our Lord, as much as to say, *My* house no longer. They had profaned it, and God departed from His temple. 2. *No righteous men were to be found amongst them* (ver. 30). Abraham's intercession for Sodom teaches us that the presence of a few righteous among a people stays the hand of justice. When those who fear God decline in a land, judgment is coming. 3. *In these judgments God was treating them on their own terms.* They had punishment in kind as well as in necessary degree. The priests had made no distinction between the holy and the profane. And thus, by their own admission, they were *not* "a holy nation." Let it be so, then; let them be profaned by being treated as such. Holiness was the very reason of their existence as a nation, and wanting *that*, there remained only a looking for judgment. The foundation of their national privileges was thus destroyed. They profaned the sanctuary, and they were themselves profaned among the heathen. They despised God, and they were "lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. ii. 30). "Their own way have I recompensed upon their heads saith the Lord God" (ver. 31).

(Ver. 28).

1. *There are prophets who will flatter wicked princes and rulers in their evil ways.* The princes were ravening wolves, shed blood, destroyed souls, to get dishonest gain, and Jerusalem's prophets daubed them with untempered mortar. They applauded their practices, justified their doings, and told them that God did approve of their ways. It was not the nobles, citizens, but the prophets of Jerusalem which did this. Princes and great ones want not false and lying prophets to bolster them up, and to bear them out in their vile and detestable courses. Ahab was a wicked king, and he had a multitude of flattering daubing prophets (2 Chron. xviii. 10, 11). There were "flattering divinations" among the false prophets (Ezek. xii. 24); and with these they bedaubed the wicked princes, and strengthened the hands of evil-doers (Jer. xxiii. 14). Flattery is evil in any, but worst of all in prophets, and especially when they have to do with wicked princes, whom they harden in their wickedness thereby, and ripen for destruction. Reproof is a precious balm (Psa. cxli. 5); but flattery is a destructive net (Prov. xxix. 5). Let the true prophets abhor it; and so speak the truth, that they may appeal to the consciences of great and

small, as Paul doth (1 Thess. ii. 5). 2. *What false prophets give out is unsavoury, and unsound, weak, and useless.* It is untempered mortar: it may stick in men's heads a little, to strengthen them to do wickedly; but it will not stick in their hearts, to strengthen them against the day of evil, and to justify their doings. What is there in vanity and lies which can establish? It is truth, and divine truth, which establisheth (2 Pet. i. 19); the vain and lying imaginations of men, do deceive and disappoint. Pashur prophesied lies, the things of his own heart and spirit, which himself and others trusted in; but see how he and they who believed him, were deceived and disappointed (Jer. xx. 6). The scornful rulers which made lies their refuge, and hid themselves under falsehood saying, "the over-flowing scourge shall not come unto us" (Isa. xxviii. 14, 15). But, see what the Lord saith (ver 17). The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. False prophecies, false opinions, false confidences are all untempered mortar. 3. *The subtlety and impudence of false prophets makes way for their vanity and lies.* They say, "thus saith the Lord God," there is their cunning; and to make God author of their vanities and lies, there is their impudency. They knew that their dreams, visions, vanities, and lies would not take with princes or people if not presented unto them as from God. They did not only abuse men, but they greatly abused God. "They have belied the Lord" (Jer. v, 12), and made that to be the word of God which was not; they walked in lies and strengthened the hands of evil-doers; which provoked God so bitterly against them, that He saith He would "feed them with wormwood and make them drink the water of gall" (Jer. xxiii. 14, 15). Many prophets amongst us have belied the Lord, in making some Scriptures speak that to maintain their opinions and tenets which never was the mind of God.—*(Greenhill).*

(Vers. 30.)

1. *God's protection of them.* He had a special care of them, being His Church and people, above all others; as the city Jerusalem had a wall about it (Neh. i. 3), so God was a wall to the citizens thereof, "a wall of fire round about them" (Zech. ii. 5; Cant. iv. 12). Lest any should hurt His vineyard, He kept it night and day, watched over it and preserved it.

2. *Consider those things which God had given them to be a hedge or wall unto them.* (1.) *Sound doctrine.* This was a "hedge" to keep out all errors, corrupt and heathenish opinions, which they were in danger of, having the nations round about them. But God had given them good doctrine (Prov. iv. 2); right words (Psa. xxxiii. 4); lively oracles (Acts vii. 38); faithful commands (Psa. cxix. 86); sure testimonies (Ps. xciii. 5); such as they were to try all doctrines and opinions by (Isa. viii. 20). (2.) *Pure worship.* This was a hedge between them and the heathen (Deut. vi. 13, 14). God had appointed them a pure way of worship, which hedged them in from all false ways of worship, from bringing in aught of their own or of others. (3.) *Good laws.* No nation under heaven had such laws to be governed by as the Jews had, and those laws were hedges against all injustice; they might not wrong one another, nor strangers. (4.) *God had given them good prophets, priests, and princes.* The prophets were to preserve the doctrine sound, the priests to keep the worship pure, and the princes to see justice impartially executed. Elijah, a good prophet, was the horsemen and chariot of Israel (2 Kings ii. 12; xiii. 14); the priests were mediators between God and the people (Joel ii. 17); the princes were the strength of the land (Prov. xxix. 4). And more briefly, it was the covenant made between God and this people; He had promised to be their God and to protect them; they had promised to be His people, and to walk in His ways. But—

3. *The "hedge" which God had given them was broken, and gaps were made in it.* (1). *The doctrine was corrupted.* There was much chaff mingled with the wheat (Jer. xxiii. 28); false prophets gave in that to be divine, which was from their own hearts and heads (Ezek. xiii. 2, 3); they prophesied lies (Jer xiv. 14); the providence of God was denied, His justice and omnipresence (Ezek. viii. 12; xviii. 2, 25). They taught the people to swear by a false God, even by Baal (Jer. xii. 16). (2). *The worship was greatly corrupted.* The sanctuary was defiled with detestable things (Ezek. v. 11). They had brought images and idols into the temple (Ezek. viii), they had high places and altars in every street (Ezek. xvi.) The statutes of Omri were kept, and the works of the house of Ahab (Micah vi. 16); and the fear or worship of God was taught by the precepts of men (Isa. xxix. 13). (3). *The laws were wrested and perverted, so that there was no justice.* They abhor judgment, and pervert all equity (Micah iii. 9). According to Isaiah, judgment was turned away backward, and justice stood afar off; they thrust them out of doors, out of their gates and cities, and when they pressed hard to come in there was no admission, the doors and gates were locked and bolted upon them, equity could not enter (Isa. lix. 14); only oppression was let in (Isa. v. 7). (4). *The men who should have been as strong stakes to keep up the "hedge" were rotten.* The prophets were "lions" (Jer. xxiii. 14); the priests corrupters and wicked (Lam. iv. 13); the princes were rebellious, and companions of thieves (Isa. i. 23); and all of them make covenant with God (Ezek. xvi. 59).

4. *How was the "hedge" to be made up?* (1.) *In public opposing those corruptions which were crept in, and practised amongst them.* When of old the Jews had broken down the "hedge" by making a calf, Moses appeared for God against this wickedess; he seized upon the calf, burnt it, and ground it into powder (Ex. xxxii.). When the sons of Levi came to him, he commissioned them to slay the idolators; and this was the beginning of making up the breach. So when Josiah began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, the groves, images, and altars that were therein, then was the "hedge" making up which they had broken down (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3, 4). In Nehemiah's days, when the "hedge" was new-made about them, there were some who began to tread down the "hedge" and to make a "gap" therein, by doing unlawful things on the Lord's day. The zeal of Nehemiah was kindled, so that he contended with the nobles of Judah, who countenanced them, and did violence to the Sabbath themselves (Neh. xiii. 15–18). (2.) *In mourning for such breaches, and deprecating the wrath and judgments due for the same.* Moses was affected much with what the people had done, and prays and intercedes for them (Ex. xxxii. 10). This act was standing in the breach, and making up the "hedge" (Psa. cvi. 23); it kept out the fury of the Lord from breaking in upon them. The intercession of God's servants is a strong "hedge" and wall to prevent judgments. Therefore, when the Lord was resolved upon the destruction of the Jews, He forbade Jeremiah to pray for them (Jer. vii. 16). (3.) *In putting things into their primitive condition.* When Josiah caused the house of the Lord to be repaired, the covenant with God to be renewed, the law to be read, and the Passover to be kept according to the institution, and all things were brought to their primitive condition (2 Chron. xxxiv.; xxxv.), then was the "hedge" made up—then was there a man stood in the gap before the Lord. So, when Jehoshaphat brought back the people from false doctrine, and false worship, to the Lord God of their fathers, then was the "hedge" made up, and God protected them against their enemies.

5. *None were found to make up the "hedge."* Were there not Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who interceded with God for this people? Were there not many that mourned for the abominations that were among them? (Jer. ix. 1; xiv. 11; Ezek. ix. 4, 8). It is true Jeremiah did appear for God: he opposed the false

prophets, the perverting of justice, the iniquities of priests, princes, and people; but they would not hearken to him (Jer. xliv. 16). They sought to put him to death, and to cast him into prison. And three times God had forbidden him to pray for them. He could prevail with none of them towards making up the "hedge." As for Ezekiel, he was in Babylon, and the Lord looked for a man amongst them in *Jerusalem*. "I looked for a man among them," not among you. For the sighers and mourners that were in Jerusalem they did it in secret. They had not spirits to contradict the wicked prophets, priests, and princes; or, if they had, yet they saw there was no good to be done. The times were exceedingly and desperately wicked; a man was made an offender for a word, and a snare was laid for him that reproved in the gate (Isa. xxix. 21). It was an evil time, and the time for the prudent to keep silence (Amos v. 12, 13). From this subject we learn—(1) *That sin makes breaches and gaps.* Their sins brake down the hedge and made those gaps (Isa. xxx. 13). Solomon's sins made such a breach therein that ten tribes were rent therefrom and given to Jeroboam (1 Kings xi. 31). Sin made the breach between them and other nations, the breach between God and them. Sin makes breaches in churches (1 Cor. i. 11, 12), in cities (Luke xix. 14), in families (Ezek. xvi. 38), in men's names (Prov. vi. 33), in men's estates (Deut. xxviii. 15, 16), in men's consciences (Matt. xxvii. 3, 4; Prov. xviii. 14, xv. 4), and between the chiefest friends (Prov. xvi. 28). There are some sins which make such breaches as shake the foundations (Psa. lxxxii. 5). The laws were their foundations, but the iniquity of the judges moved those foundations out of place, and the state was like a bowing wall and a tottering fence (Psa. lxii. 3). (2). *When breaches and gaps are made by sin, the Lord lets in His judgments thereby.* When they made breaches upon the worship, statutes, and Sabbaths of the Lord, He resolved to pour out his fury upon them and consume them (Isa. i. 23, 24). Such is the lesson of the parable (Isa. v. 6). (3). *When the hedge is down, and gaps are made, the Lord looks for some one to appear, so as to prevent those judgments.* "I sought for a man to make up the hedge," &c. God expected that they should have repented, and some at least to have said, What have I done? God was displeased, and now He looked that one or other should have showed a public spirit, opposed the sinful practices, and deprecated judgments. He looks in all the gaps round about, and "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor" (Isa. lxx. 16), none to meet God, to set upon Him by prayer and strong arguments to withhold His judgments. (4) *Making up the hedge, and standing in the gap, is the way to save a land from destruction.* Let man oppose the sinful practices in a land and deprecate the judgments of God, then the Lord will spare a sinful nation, a guilty city (Jer. v. i.) In such a case one man may do much. Moses stood in the gap, and diverted the wrath of God (Psa. cvi. 22); Aaron, also (Num. xvi. 47, 48). We, through infinite mercy, have had some like Moses and Aaron, to make up our hedges, raise up our foundations, to stop some gaps; but all our gaps are not yet stopped. Are there not gaps in the hedge of doctrine? If it were not so, how came in such erroneous, blasphemous, and wild opinions amongst us? Are there not gaps in the worship of God? Do not many tread down all churches, all ordinances; yea, the very Scriptures? Are there not gaps in the hedge of justice, through which the bulls of Bashan enter, which oppress the poor, and crush the needy (Amos iv. 1)? Are there not gaps in the hedge of love; is not that bond of perfection broken? Are there not gaps in the hedge of conscience? Is not the peace broken between God and your souls? Doth not Satan come in often at the gap and disturb you? (5) *In times of general corruption in Church and State, it is hard to find a man of public spirit to oppose those corruptions, and to wrestle with God for mercy.* The Lord "sought for a man amongst them."

The judges and great ones did oppress the people, and none appeared publicly for them, to plead their cause and to reprove their oppressors. Many disliked the carriage of things, but they had no spirit to oppose; they were "not valiant for the truth," as Jeremiah saith (Jer. ix. 3). God doth not say that there were "none," but "none to help, none to uphold." In common corruptions and calamities few have hearts to appear for the public good, against overspreading evils. Sinful prudence, or fear of crushing, makes them silent and lie hid (Eccles. iv. 1). The oppressions under the sun were great, the tears of the oppressed many, but there was no comforter, none pitied them, none used any means to relieve them (*Greenhill*).

The Sins of Israel and Judah represented under the figure of Two Harlots. (Chap xxiii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Samaria and Jerusalem are the capitals and representations of the two kingdoms Israel and Judah. These two cities are presented under the allegory of two harlots who are sisters, and who have practiced whoredom from the days of Egypt onwards. (Vers. 2–4.)

Vers. 1–4. The two harlot sisters are briefly described.

Ver. 2. "Two women, the daughters of one mother." "These two cities had a common mother—the Hebrew people; regard being had to what they had become in the possession of that people."—*(Henderson).*

Ver. 3. "They committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth." The prophet regards this two-fold divisions of the people as dating long before the time of the separation of the kingdoms. The two kingdoms existed virtually in Egypt in the tribes of Ephraim and Judah. The origin of their idolatry is to be traced to Egypt, where all the tribes alike fell into that sin. It was in the very "youth" of the people that they had become alienated from God. "There they bruised the teats of their virginity." "At that time Israel was still unmarried. The marriage with Jehovah took place when the covenant was made at Sinai. But she was even at that time betrothed. This is proved by what God had done to the Patriarchs, and by the circumcision to which they had submitted; and hence their unchaste conduct fell under the judgment of (Deut. xxii. 23, &c.). Their business was to prepare themselves as a pure virgin for marriage."—*(Hengstenberg).* "On account of the legitimate relation in which the nation stood to God from its very origin, namely, of a marriage covenant, the political and religious departure of both kingdoms from the principles laid down in the law, appears as wantonness (Ezek. xvi. 15). Egypt was the means of exciting the first carnal impulses of the youthful people to a heathenish mode of feeling and action, whereby they were robbed of their virgin purity."—*(Lange.)*

Ver. 4. "Aholah the elder." This name signifies, *Her own tent.* Thus it is implied that the worship of the Samaritans was of their own invention and was never appointed of Jehovah. The northern kingdom had erected an altar of her own will (1 Kings xii. 31–33). "Aholibah her sister." The meaning of this name is, *My tent is in her.* Jehovah had ordained the temple-worship at Jerusalem. He had chosen Zion for an habitation to set His name there (Psa. cxxxii. 13, 14). "And they were Mine." "Previous to the apostasy under Jeroboam, Samaria, equally with Jerusalem, worshipped the true God. Their inhabitants were sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. He never renounced His right to the Israelites

as subjects of theocracy, but sent prophets to disclose His will to them and warn them against idolatry. The northern kingdom was the sphere of the special labours of Elijah and Elisha."—(*Henderson*).

HOMILETICS.

Spiritual Adultery.

I. It consists in forsaking the Creator to love and serve the creature. The children of Israel committed whoredoms in Egypt by worshipping its idols. They forsook their God, who had called them to love and serve Himself, and to forsake all other. Idolatry is the perversion of a true religious instinct, as lust is the perversion of a passion which should inspire the devotion of love and self sacrifice. The worship and service of the creature is *unauthorised*. And it also *debases*.

II. The sin of it is manifest from the nature of the relations in which we stand to God. "There were two women, the daughters of one mother." God was a Father unto Israel. The people were His own peculiar heritage. By their idolatry they were bringing dishonour upon the name of God. Duties arise out of our relation to God which cannot be set aside without bringing upon ourselves the stain and the consequences of transgression.

III. In the youth of a people they are especially exposed to this sin "They committed whoredoms in their youth." The allurements of Egyptian idolatry soon corrupted Israel in the days of her youth. Their feelings were fresh, their experience small, and the pleasures of Egypt were novel and strange. Young societies are greatly exposed to the dangerous fascinations of those by whom they are surrounded. So the early Christian Church was soon corrupted by false philosophy; and in a later age, by the seductions of wordly power and grandeur. Also, in the youth of human life, the lusts and pleasures of the world are most powerful to seduce.

IV. This sin may be prevalent amidst all the refinements of civilization. The Israelites found in Egypt an advanced civilization. Yet amidst all this were to be found the coarsest and most debasing forms of idolatry. How much grovelling and degrading superstition is still to be found in the midst of the highest civilization!

V. This sin should be denounced in plain terms. The fleshly sins, which are here used as a figure of spiritual sins, are described in plain language. They are set forth in all their naked deformity; spoken of exactly as they are. Those who counsel such sins would like (if they hear of them at all) to have their loathsomeness hidden under the veil of elegant speech. "Plain speaking is not attractive; flowery ambiguities are of the devil"—(*Lange*). Those who blame the prophet for his great plainness of speech should rather concern themselves with the thought of the baseness of those sins which demanded so faithful a narration and exposure. The whole of this passage teaches us that true religion leads to fellowship with God, His love and service. And all love and service inconsistent with this belongs to a class of sins which can best be described under the images of the worst and most degrading of fleshly lusts.

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1. *The Lord takes notice where and when those who are in relation to Him do sin.* "In Egypt, and in their youth." They sinned amidst the grand and bitter enemies of God, among Egyptians, and then when they were growing up to be a people. They should have considered what enemies the Egyptians were

to their God and His worship, how odious their ways and worship were to Him. They should have walked circumspectly, so that they might have kept His name from being polluted; and likewise they, being in their youth under bondages, should have minded God's kindnesses in preserving them, and making them to prosper. When God is beginning to show kindness to a people in misery, and raising them up to some height and greatness, and then for them to turn aside to lewdness, to superstitions, idolatrous, and heathenish practices, this God observes in a special manner, and it provokes Him greatly (Psa. cvi. 7). When states, cities, families, degenerate in their youth, it sorely displeases God. 2. *Wheresoever a devised worship is brought in, there man's tabernacle is set up; where true worship is advanced, there is God's tabernacle.* The ten tribes had a worship of Jereboam's devising, like unto the worship of Jerusalem in many things; but this was Aholah, *their own tabernacle.* God owned it not, He was not in their assemblies, He accepted not their sacrifices, their incense was a stink in His nostrils. But Jerusalem was Aholibah, *My tabernacle*, there God's own worship was set up, and so long as His worship was there, He acknowledged His tabernacle to be in her. Where His worship is, there He dwells (Psa. lxviii. 16); and is to be seen and enquired of (Psa. xxvii. 4).—*Greenhill.*

(Vers. 5–10).

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — The spiritual adultery of Samaria with Assyria. The instrument of her punishment is that very people which she had made the object of her impure love.

Ver. 5. **The Assyrians her neighbours.** The word refers rather to kinsmen, rather than to those dwelling near. Asshur was brother to Arphaxad, Abraham's ancestor (Gen. x. 22, 24; xi. 16–26).

Ver. 6. **Clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses.** "This description given of the Assyrians contains the thought that Israel, dazzled by Assyria's splendour, and overpowered by the might of that kingdom, had been drawn into intercourse with the Assyrians, which led her astray into idolatry. The predicate, clothed in purple, points to the splendour and glory of this imperial power; the other predicates, to the magnitude of its military force." *(Keil).* We have here the ground which tempted Aholah to become unfaithful to her God. It lay in this, that the paramour Assyria came into her neighbourhood, and placed his grandeur before her. Therein lay the temptation to sue for his favour to ward off injury. The adultery has been not so much a religious as a political import. The paramour, on whose account Israel forsakes his God, is Assyria itself, not its god, though they endeavoured, no doubt from fear of the people, to make friends of its gods also." *(Hengstenberg).*

Ver. 8. **"Neither left she her whoredoms brought from Egypt."** This was the Apis-worship of which Israel was guilty while in Horeb. Jeroboam instituted it, thus reviving the former iniquity of the nation. The people never wholly got rid of this source of unfaithfulness brought from Egypt. Even Jehu tolerated it (2 Kings x. 31).

Ver. 10. **"These discovered her nakedness."** "This denotes the ignominious treatment which Israel must suffer from Assyria, as a punishment for her revolt to Egypt. Aholah is slain with the sword: the proper substance of the people, the men fit for service, fell in the war, while the weaker portion was carried into exile." (*Hengstenberg.*) **"Famous among women."** "She was rendered as notorious by her punishment as she had been by her crimes. She was made an example to which an appeal could be made by other states" *Henderson.*

HOMILETICS.

The Sin of Samaria.

I. It showed the basest ingratitude. "Played the harlot when she was Mine." God had united her to Himself, she was in living and tender relationship with Him when she basely deserted His worship and service. She was taught the true doctrine, and the right way of duty, and was supplied with means to observe both. Yet she sinned against light and privilege.

II. It showed the dangerous power of the imagination. The military organization of Assyria dazzled their imagination. The glory of the world seduces the worldly mind. "Clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses." Such was the power and grandeur of Assyria. In accordance with the figure employed, those things are named which would be likely to strike the eye of a wordly minded young woman. Israel admired the political and worldly grandeur of the Assyrians, and so were seduced into idolatry. They first worshipped the power and magnificence of the nation, and then it was an easy matter to adopt the worship of their gods. The fascinations of the world is still the standing danger to purity in doctrine and worship. In all sensuous forms of religious worship there lurks this great danger, that men through admiration of the outward are led to adopt the false doctrines of which it is the vehicle.

III. It showed how inveterate are old evils. "Brought from Egypt" (ver. 8). The old idolatry which they had learned in Egypt clung to the nation, every now and then breaking out. The nation was never clearly delivered from it till after their captivity in Babylon.

IV. It was visited with exemplary punishment. 1. *Those who had seduced her by their power and grandeur were made the very instruments of her punishment.* She had doted on the Assyrians, and she was delivered into their hands (ver. 9). 2. *She was made a warning example to all.* "Famous among women." An example to all the other nations. They would talk of her; some of her abominable wickedness, others of her miseries, previous judgments, and calamities.

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1. *When people embrace false worship they are violent and strong in their affections towards it.* Aholah doted upon her lovers, her heart was fired with Babylonish gods, and confidences in them. 2. *What evil persons have practised in their youth that they affect in their age.* Aholah had loved the Egyptian idols in her minority, and after she was grown up, those idols were not out of her thoughts. Her Egyptian lovers were still in her mind, like harlots that mind their former lovers long after they are married. What corruption gets in youth, grows up and abides; an unclean, idolatrous heart in youth, will be so in age. 3. *Idolatry may continue long in a nation, but shall at least be severely punished by the Lord.* Aholah had been an idolatress from her youth, and when she was grown up to some greatness, then she broke out into gross, notorious idolatry (1 Kings xii.); in which she continued for upwards of two hundred and sixty years, and then the Lord plagued, yea, destroyed her, her sons and daughters. It is wisdom to cleave to the Lord and His worship, not to follow or confide in other nations, or their ways. 4. *God makes places and persons remarkable by the judgments He executeth upon them.* Aholah was made famous among women by those judgments He brought upon her. Aholah was Samaria, which Shalmaneser besieged three years, and then took it; and afterwards burnt it (2 Kings xvii. 5, 6).—*Greenhill.*

(Vers. 11–21.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—The spiritual adultery of Judah with Assyria, in which she surpasses Samaria in her iniquity.

Ver. 11. "**She was more corrupt in her inordinate love.**" "Judah went much further than Samaria. It not only indulged in sinful intercourse with Assyria, which led on to idolatry as the latter had done, but it also allowed itself to be led astray by the splendour of Chaldea to form alliances with that imperial power, and to defile itself with her idolatry. And when it became tired of the Chaldeans it formed impure connections with the Egyptians as it had done once before during its sojourn in Egypt" (*Keil*).

Ver. 12. "**Doted upon the Assyrians, her neighbours.**" "The reference here is to the application made by Ahaz to Tiglath-pileser for his assistance against the Syrians and Israelites (recorded 2 Kings xvi. 7–9), which led to the idolatrous transaction at Damascus, and the introduction of the Syrian idolatry into Jerusalem (2 Chron. xxviii. 16)" (*Henderson*). "**Clothed most gorgeously.**" The word means *perfection*, and the thought intended is, perfect beauty of clothing. "The costume of the Assyrian cavalry may be seen in the sculptures brought by Layard from Nineveh, which display all the magnificence of Oriental finery" (*Henderson*).

Ver. 14. "**She saw men portrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion.**" "In regard to the Chaldeans, the relation to them was brought about by means of *likenesses*, which Judah saw. The word means, *something engraven* or *sketched, painted*. These were, probably, coloured bas-reliefs, in vermilion, which would be all the more appropriate for warriors. The representation here may probably be the mere drapery of the thought, that the bare report of the military prowess of the Chaldeans had inflamed the imagination and the senses of Judah. Owing to the undeniable intercourse between nations in the Old World, which certainly obtained between Palestine and Babylon, it is not in itself unimaginable that such wall-pictures of representatives of foreign nations may have existed in the royal palaces of Judah."—*(Lange)*.

Ver. 15. "**Exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads.**" The reference is to the lofty turbans, such as may be seen on the monuments of ancient Nineveh.

Ver. 18. "**My mind was alienated from her.**" "The thought in these verses (vers. 16-18) is the following:—the acquaintance made by Israel (Judah) with the imperial splendour of the Chaldeans, as exhibited in the sculptures of their palaces, incited Judah to cultivate political and mercantile intercourse with this imperial power, which led to its becoming entangled in the heathen ways and idolatry of the Chaldeans. The Chaldeans themselves came and laid the foundation for an intercourse which led to the pollution of Judah with heathenism, and afterwards filled it with disgust, because it was brought thereby into dependence upon the Chaldeans. The consequence of all this was, that the Lord became tired of Judah. For instead of returning to the Lord, Judah turned to the other power of the world, namely, to Egypt; and in the time of Zedekiah renewed its ancient coquetry with that nation." *(Keil)*.

Ver. 19. "**In calling to remembrance the days of her youth.**" She had grown disgusted with Babylon; yet she repented not, but turned back again to the old ways which she had learned in Egypt (2 Kings xxiii. 29-35).

Ver. 20. "**Whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses.**" "This representation is sufficiently explained by the

particularly lecherous character of the animals mentioned, and describes the obscene character of the Egyptians (Ezek. xvi. 26)."—*(Lange.)*

Ver. 21. "Calledst to remembrance the lewdness of thy youth" (Heb.). "And thou didst visit the lewdness of thy youth." "The falling back into the old sin is, as it were, a visit which is paid to that which ought to be hated and avoided. The words, 'When a man of Egypt handled,' etc., refer to the attempt of the Egyptians to draw the people in their first beginnings into the Egyptian unity, and so to nationalize them—an attempt to which the youth of the people furnished the occasion."—*(Hengstenberg.)*

HOMILETICS.

The Sin of Judah.

The sin of Judah was one of special aggravation. Her sin surpassed that of Samaria. "She was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her whoredoms more than her sister in her whoredoms." 1. *She had greater privileges.* A purer knowledge of the true way of worship. Greater grace to resist temptation, and to keep in the right way. 2. *She had the warning example of Samaria's punishment.* She saw how God punished them by the very instruments of their inordinate love, and yet took not warning. "They both took one way," not reflecting that they who take the same way also reach the same end. 3. *She used special devices to increase her sinful desires.* "She increased her whoredoms." She stimulated her lustful imagination by pictures and representations of forbidden objects. The sight of these would set her longing after the seductive idolatry of the nations, and draw her away from her lawful love and home. The lust of the eye is one of the great dangers of the world. She also suffered herself to be ensnared by the memory of her old sins (vers. 19, 21). It is sad when nations and individuals go back again to the sins of their early life. 4. *She brought sad judgment upon herself, yet repented not.* When she had obtained her desire and embraced the idolatry of Babylon, she was still unsatisfied and even learned to loathe that which she once so eagerly sought. "Her mind was alienated from them." Israel could not find rest in the idolatry of the nations, for she still retained some memory of better things. The people could not become as the heathen in all respects, for their glorious past was still a fact and could not be separated from their history. The idolatry of Babylon could not satisfy the sinful longings of the chosen people. All impure lust, when it has spent its passion, becomes hatred. For all such lust is selfish and will turn, at length, into aversion to its object. Fellowship with sin must only be of short duration. There is no true binding principle in it. But it was the shame and misery of Israel that the judgments of God, and her disgust of Babylon, failed to bring her to repentance.

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1. *When God executes severe judgments upon cities He looks that others should take warning thereby.* God destroyed Samaria for her idolatry and confederating with heathenish nations. When Jerusalem saw this she reformed not, but was more corrupt. God expected that Jerusalem should hereupon have purged out all idolatry, and cleaved wholly to Him, so that she might have been spared, but she made no good use of His dealings with Samaria. 2. *Progress in the same sins, after judgments executed upon others is a fearful aggravation of sin.* "When she saw this she was more corrupt." When God's hand is lifted, judgment executed, men should fear and learn righteousness; but to go on in wickedness is a horrible slighting, yea, despising of God and His judgments. 3. *Sinful cities usually grow worse whatever judgments they see executed upon*

others. Jerusalem was more corrupt than Samaria. So corrupt is the nature of man that it is not only worse after mercies but even after judgments. 4. *The eyes are instruments and occasions of great evil.* When she saw the images of the Chaldeans in their dresses, with their belts and aspects, she was taken with them. The images affected her eyes, and they conveyed corruption to her heart, or that which stirred the corruption pre-existent in her heart. Adultery and idolatry have their chief entrance by the eye, and many other sins likewise. What a sad thing was it, that Jerusalem's eyes should be taken with the painted images of Babylonians! Some confess there is danger by gazing upon living objects, the beauties of men and women, but they fear none from dead objects; but Achan saw a wedge of gold and a Babylonish garment, and they snared him; Aholibah here saw Babylonish pictures, and they ensnared him. 5. *For God's people to admit any part of Babylonish worship is to defile the bed of love.* God is a jealous God, His worship must be pure, and the heart must be pure. If the worship be mixed, or heart lean upon an arm of flesh, the bed of love is defiled. In His worship and ordinances God lets out His love to the soul. When they are pure, by the heart being pure and confiding in God, He lets out Himself and His love. Let us look to our hearts, that they may be disengaged from all creature confidences, and to our worship that it be according to God, and then we shall have communion with and comfort from our Beloved. 6. *Wickedness is inconstant.* "Her mind was alienated from them." She was taken with the very images of the Babylonians; now she cares not for the men themselves, her soul is disjointed from them; but it was to fall in with some others, and they were the Egyptians (ver. 19). But she held not there long; which made the Lord to say, "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wert ashamed of Assyria" (Jer. ii. 36). 7. *Impudence and open sinning cause God to disown and renounce them that do so.* Aholibah discovered her whoredoms and nakedness; she talked openly what she had done with the Babylonians, she set up altars and idols in every street, was openly and impudently wicked, prostituting herself to all in the streets. Now it being so, saith the Lord, "then my mind was alienated from her," seeing she is become so audaciously wicked, I can affect her no longer. Jerusalem's wickedness alienated God's heart from her, made Him renounce her for a harlot. It is sad when God renounces (Hos. i. 9). If we would not have God's heart alienated from us, and so be disowned, renounced by Him, let us take heed of all sins, especially of impudency in any sin. 8. *Fresh sins bring to mind former old sins.* Aholibah's latter trucking with the Egyptians minded God of her primitive whoredoms and abominations, when she lived in Egypt, which was one thousand years before: there she had her lovers; there she defiled herself "with the idols of Egypt" (Exek. xx. 17); and her affection now to Egypt, and Egypt's paramours, caused God to mind those sins of her youth. He had no pleasure in doing so, but Aholibah called them to remembrance, by acting the same or the like things again, she called them out of darkness, and presented them to the view of God. *(Greenhill).*

(Verses 22-35.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — The transgression of Jerusalem is followed by her punishment.

Ver. 23. "Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa." "From the circumstance that these names occur in immediate connection with the Babylonians, the Chaldeans, and Assyrians, and further that *Pekod* is used by Jeremiah (ch. l. 21) as a descriptive name of Babylon, it may be inferred that all three are to be so interpreted in this place. No such geographical names as Shoa and Koa occur either in sacred or profane writers. The former, however, signify-

ing *wealth* or *opulence*, and the latter, *princely, noble*, are aptly descriptive of the state of Babylon in the days of her prosperity, as *Pekod*, is of her anticipated punishment." (*Henderson*).

Ver. 24. "**Buckler, and shield, and helmet.**" These are all defensive armour. The Chaldeans had only to lay siege to the city and bide their time. God's arrows would do the rest. "**And they shall judge thee according to their judgments.**" Israel was to be judged on the ground of natural justice. The unfaithful city was condemned by *man* for an offence against *human* law. Their judgments were brought about by God's righteous law of retribution, though Nebuchadnezzar was the instrument raised up to administer it.

Ver. 25. "**They shall take away thy nose and thine ears.**" "What nose and ears are for a woman, that for a people is their military strength, the bloom of the nation. When this is annihilated, a people has lost its beauty. That the words must refer to this is shown by those immediately adjoining, and giving the explanation, "Thy remnant shall fall by the sword." Zion has various forms of existence, and, therefore, a manifold remnant. The first remnant refers to the fighting men, who, so to speak, shall fall by the sword to the last man—the falling of the remnant pre-supposes the falling of all the rest; the second remnant refers to Zion as a city, the houses, all of which shall be destroyed by fire" (*Hengstenberg*). "Punishment by cutting off the nose and ears was inflicted for adultery, not only the Chaldeans, but also among the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. It was, therefore, to represent that which adulterous Judah was to suffer under the image of such ignominious and cruel treatment. They were also to be stripped of what lewd females set most value upon—their rich dresses and costly jewels, by which they attract the notice of their paramours" (ver. 26). —*Henderson.*

Ver. 27. "**Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee.**" The punishment inflicted by the Chaldeans would be effectual in curing them of idolatry. After the captivity the Jews never fell again into this sin.

Ver. 29. "**Shall take away all thy labour.**" They were to be deprived of the fruits of their labours. "**The nakedness of thy whoredoms shall be discovered.**" "As long as all went well this nakedness was covered. The shamefulness of her conduct did not come to the light. In that which she suffers, what she has done will be manifest to all the world."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 32. "**Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup deep and large.**" "This cup is the figure of the destiny. The mockery of large measure corresponds to the cup of wide compass, the greatness of the mockery to the greatness of the calamity, that called forth the mockery so much the more, the greater the pretensions of the Jews, who conducted themselves as the people to whom was secured the universal supremacy, who had always in their mouth the saying, 'My enemies shall fall, but I shall tread on their high places.'" —(*Hengstenberg*). "By a change of metaphor the judgments to be inflicted upon Judah are represented as the contents of a cup which she was to drink. This metaphor is of frequent occurrence both in the Old and New Testaments (Psa. lxxv. 8; Jer. xxv. 15; Rev. xiv. 10; xvi. 19; xviii. 6.) The force of the metaphor lies in the idea that the ingredients were nauseous and deleterious. Judah was to be treated as Israel had been, only more severely in proportion to the greater guilt she had contracted. —(*Henderson*).

Ver. 34. "**And thou shalt break the sherds thereof, and pluck off thine own breasts.**" This expresses most forcibly the desperation to which the Jews should be reduced, when compelled to undergo the extreme infliction of their punishment. By a bold hyperbole, not satisfied with having

sucked out the last drop that was in the cup, they are represented as crunching the very sherds of it with their teeth, and tearing their breasts which they had prostituted in adultery" (*Henderson*). "The tearing of the breasts is placed beside the breaking of the sherds as if it were done by means of the sherd-fragments. Or it may have been done in frenzy by her own nails. We find a historical illustration of this in the treatment they gave Gedaliah, the Chaldean governor, for which they were compelled to suffer (Jer. xli.)" (*Lange*).

HOMILETICS.

(Verses 22–35.)

The Punishment of Jerusalem.

I. The people are to be punished by those with whom they sinned. "Behold I will raise up thy lovers against thee" (ver. 22). Those with whom she had pleasurable sin, by a natural retribution become the instruments of her chastisement. Thus sinners are punished by means of other sinners. Whatever pleasures may have been found in sin when it was followed, the memory of it, at last, will bear a sting.

II. The people are to be punished in the ordinary course of human justice. "And they shall judge thee according to their judgments" (ver. 24). They had offended against the sense of natural justice which was found among the nations. And they are punished by *men* for an offence against *human* law. Yet, though men were the instruments, they were punished by God. The punishment of sin in human society is natural, yet it is surely the moral law of God taking effect as far as is possible in this present life. "From the natural course of things, vicious actions are, to a great degree, actually punished as mischievous to society; and besides punishment actually inflicted upon this account, there is also the fear and apprehension of it in those persons whose crimes have rendered them obnoxious to it, in case of a discovery; this state of fear itself often a very considerable punishment. The natural fear and apprehension of it, too, which restrains from such crimes, is a declaration of Nature against them. It is necessary to the very being of society, that vices destructive to it should be punished *as being so;* the vices of falsehood, injustice, cruelty: which punishment therefore is as natural as society; and so is an instance of a kind of moral government, naturally established, and actually taking place. And, since the certain natural course of things is the conduct of Providence or the government of God, though carried on by the instrumentality of men; the observation here made amounts to this, that mankind find themselves placed by him in such circumstances, as that they are unavoidably accountable for their behaviour, and are often punished, and sometimes rewarded under his government, in the view of their being mischievous, or eminently beneficial to society. The Author of Nature has as truly directed that vicious actions, considered as mischievous to society, should be punished, and put mankind under a necessity of thus punishing them; as He has directed and necessitated us to preserve our lives by food" (*Butler's Analogy*, Part I, Chap. III). The goodness and patience of God had failed to bring Jerusalem to repentance, and the people, therefore, were given up to punishment by means of man.

III. The people are to be punished by the violent taking away of that which led them into the snares of sin. "They shall deal furiously with thee: they shall take away thy nose and thine ears" (ver. 25). "They shall also

strip thee of thy clothes, and take away thy fair jewels" (ver. 26). Personal attractions, beautiful garments, adornments and jewellery make lewd women attractive, and lead them into snares. God will remove from His people, even by means of the wrath of a strange nation, all those things which tempted their hearts from Him. They had left their first and lawful love, and they are to have the punishment of adulterers.

IV. The punishment was to be terrible. 1. *A complete exposure of their iniquity.* "The nakedness of thy whoredoms shall be discovered, both thy lewdness and thy whoredoms" (ver. 29). Punishment exposes. Their moral loathesomeness would be laid bare before the sight of all. 2. *The rich heritage of the past was to be wasted.* "They shall deal with thee hatefully, and shall take away all thy labour" (ver. 29). All the results of their labour in the past under the guidance of God. How often, among nations, is destroyed, as in a moment, the slow work of long ages,—the precious heritage of the past! "The city where David dwelt" (Isa. xxix. 1), and all which in their history led up to David and from him, is doomed to be destroyed. 3. *They would have to drink of a bitter cup.* Their cup was to be "filled with drunkeness and sorrow," the "cup of astonishment and desolation" (ver. 33). And the very greatness of their sorrow, their abject humiliation would occasion derision among their enemies, "Thou shalt be laughed to scorn, and had in derision; it containeth much" (ver. 32). The nations would look upon them swallowing the nauseous draught, and make merriment over their sorrow. They would have to drain this cup of sorrow to the last drop, "Thou shalt even drink of it and suck it out, and thou shalt break the sherds thereof" (ver. 34). 4. *They would be driven to the frenzy of madness.* "And pluck off thine own breasts" (ver. 34). Jerusalem is represented as a woman seized with madness in her great suffering, who gnaws the very sherds of the earthen cup and tears out her own breasts. Her insatiable lust, which had gone to the length of mad desire, is now met by a punishment which is furious, and which drives her to madness. How often are sinners punished in those members of the body in which they have sinned!

V. This punishment would prove an effectual remedy for their sin. "Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee, and thy whoredom brought from the land of Egypt" (ver. 27). By the afflictions which they suffered in Babylon they were completely cured of idolatry. They never fell into that evil after the Captivity. This was an old-rooted sin, but it was entirely plucked from them. So God educates nations, and brings home to them, at last, the lessons of His providence and grace. And it is often necessary that, as with individual men, they should be educated through punishment. It took a long time to deliver Israel entirely from Egypt, their house of bondage. Their physical slavery was soon destroyed, but their spiritual slavery still held them to Egypt through many ages of their history.

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1. *God makes them instruments of woe and misery with whom we have sinned.* The Babylonians, Chaldeans, the Assyrians, her lovers, were to be brought against her. Jerusalem had doted upon and trusted in them, and by them would God plague Jerusalem. She had often sinned by her confidence in Egypt (Isa. xxx. 2; xxxi. 1); and God by the Egyptians scourged her (2 Chron. xxxvi. 3). Parents dote upon their children, and oft God makes them rods to whip them, yea, clubs to break their hearts and bones. 2. *When people go from God to false worship, and put confidence in arms of flesh, God will deal severely by them.* God would put Aholibah into the Babylonian hands. He would set His jealousy against her, thrust her out of doors; and what then? The Babylonian would deal furiously with her, abuse her body, destroy her children, burn her habitation, strip her of her vestments and jewels, take away all she had gotten, lay open her shame, and do hatefully by her;

she should be punished with the same punishments Aholah was. 3. *Judgments and afflictions are cups which the Lord gives sinners to drink of, some more some less.* Sometimes God's judgments are called a "cup of trembling" (Isa. li. 22); sometimes a "cup of fury" (Jer. xxv. 15), and sometimes "a cup of astonishment," as here. And Aholibah had all these cups given her to drink; they were "deep, large," containing much, and she was made to drink them all off, yea to the very dregs. As men fill up the measure of their sins, so God fills up the cups of His judgments. "Fill to her double" (Rev. xviii. 6). Babylon's sins were come to the full, and the cup of the Lord's fury was full. 4. *Neglect and contempt of God, and His word, causes Him to execute judgment.* "Because thou hast forgotten Me, and cast Me behind thy back." Thou hast made Me bear thy sins, and thou shalt bear My punishments. As the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, so the forgetting of God is the beginning of folly and all evil. Then God is out of sight, behind the back; and what will not men do when no awe of God or His word is upon them? Then, like Aholibah, they will commit any lewdness. God had done much for Aholibah, dealt by her like a loving husband; but she slighted Him, went out a whoring from Him, did those things which greatly dishonoured Him, and so provoked Him to mind her that forgot Him. He fell upon her with His judgments, and destroyed her. And so will the Lord do by all that forget Him (Psa. ix. 17). Whatever sins the nations commit, they are comprehended in their forgetting God, that is the root of all evil.—*(Greenhill).*

(Vers. 36–49).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Judah and Samaria are considered as joined together in their sin and punishment.

Ver. 37. "They have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands." "The actual subject matter of these verses is closely connected with ver. 16, more especially in the designation of the sins as adultery and bloodshed (compare vers. 37 and 45 with Ch. xvi. 38). They committed adultery with the idols, thus placing the idols on a par with Jehovah as the husband of Israel (compare Jer. iii. 8 and ii. 27. For the Moloch-worship compare Ch. xvi. 20, 21, and Ch. xx. 31").—*Keil.*

Ver. 39. "Then they came the same day into My sanctuary to profane it." "So callous and daring were the Jews in their idolatry that on the very day on which they had burned their children to Moloch in the valley of Gehenna, they hypocritically presented themselves as worshippers in the temple of Jehovah. Compare Jer. vii. 9, 10." (*Henderson*). The profanation consisted, not simply in idol-worship considered by itself, but in worshipping the true God in connection with their idols. Thus they placed Jehovah on a par with Moloch.

Ver. 40. "Ye have sent for men to come from far." The Heb. verb being in the imperfect tense shows that the action was continuous. Not that they merely sent once and again, but that they were wont to do so. "For whom thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thy eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments." "They spread fine paint of a black colour on the eyelids so as to produce a black margin, and thus make the white of the eye look more beautiful and seducing. It is a custom still practised by Oriental females. Jerusalem is represented as so doing to entice her lovers. She left nothing untried by which this might be effected" (*Henderson*). "The eyelashes and eyebrows were stained with a powder, so as to make the glance of the eye more brilliant."—*Lange.*

Ver. 41. "Satest upon a stately bed, and a table prepared before it." "She seated herself upon a cushion (not

lay down upon a bed), and in front of this there was a table, spread with different kinds of food, upon which she placed incense and oil."—*(Keil.)* "The board or table is furnished with meats and drinks. Eating and drinking play an important part in adultery, either in the usual or in the spiritual sense."—*(Hengstenberg).* "Whereupon thou hast set Mine incense and Mine oil." The force of this charge lies in the fact that she devoted the offerings which belonged to Jehovah to the gratification of her lovers. "Religious ceremonies are not here spoken of. We find ourselves in the region of political idolatry, which in the latest times of the people, from the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah, far outweighed that of religion. The corresponding reality consists in the rich gifts by which Judah endeavoured to purchase the favour of the heathen sovereigns (Isa. xxx. 6)."—*(Hengstenberg.)* Some understand this passage as describing the lascivious worship of the Babylonish Mylitta. The wanton Israel is described as preparing herself for one of the high festivals of this goddess, and as abandoning herself to strangers like the young women of Babylon.

Ver. 42. "A voice of a multitude being at ease was with her." They are at ease, in careless, undisturbed prosperity. "Sabeans from the Wilderness." "Instead of receiving the warnings given them by the prophets, and humbling themselves on account of their idolatries, the inhabitants of Jerusalem indulged in rioting and drunkenness—bringing even the vulgar Arabs from the desert to keep them company."—*(Henderson.)* The phrase "from the desert," cannot indicate the home of these men, but simply the place from which they came to Judah, namely, from the desert of Syria and Arabia, which separated Palestine from Babylon. These peoples decorated the arms of the harlots with clasps, and their heads with splendid wreaths (crowns). The thought is simply that Samaria and Judah had attained to wealth and earthly glory through their intercourse with these nations; the very gifts with which, according to Ch. xvi. 11, &c., Jehovah Himself had adorned His people."—*(Keil)*

Ver. 43. "Old in adulteries." *Lit. who was debilitated for adultery.* "The Heb. word does not indicate the means by which the strength has been exhausted, but is an accusation of direction or reference, debilitated with regard to adultery, so as no longer to be capable of practising it."—*(Keil.)* "Will they now commit whoredoms with her?" "Disgusting as was her character as an old adulteress, Jerusalem found those who encouraged her in her wickedness. Taken in connection with the next verse, the two sisters are again presented to view, though Aholibah is specially singled out, being the more guilty of the two."—*(Henderson.)*

Ver. 45. "The righteous men." Men who had the right on their side. Such were the Chaldeans, who were the instruments of God's righteous anger. "The Chaldeans are righteous according to their mission as ministers of the Divine vengeance. The heathen tyrant also, in Isa. xlix. 24, is designated as righteous."—*(Hengstenberg.)* "A moral comparison between the Chaldeans and the Jews is not intended, nor are prophets and righteous men among the people themselves to be imagined."—*(Lange.)*

Ver. 46. "I will bring up a company upon them." "Here the prophet is first addressed. What shall happen is, as it were, wrought by him, as the power which gave the prophecy produces also the fulfilment; in the prophecy also, ideally considered, the fulfilment is already present. The *community* denotes usually the congregation of Israel. As this has failed to do its duty, reacting against the crime, as once happened in the war against Benjamin (Judg. xx.), so stands here the community of the heathen, which God summons to execute His vengeance."—*(Hengstenberg.)*

Ver. 48. "All women." All the nations, to whom Israel would serve as a warning and deterring example.

Ver. 49. "They shall recompense your lewdness upon you." "The punishment is announced to both the women, Israel and Judah, as still in the future, although Aholah (Samaria) had been overtaken by the judgment a considerable time before. The explanation of this is to be found in the allegory itself, in which both kingdoms are represented as being sisters of one mother; and it may also be defended on the ground that the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah affected the remnants of the kingdom of the ten tribes, which were still to be found in Palestine; whilst, on the other hand, the judgment was not restricted to the destruction of the two kingdoms, but also embraced the latter judgments which fell upon the entire nation."—(*Keil.*)

HOMILETICS.

Another Summary of the Sins and Punishment of Judah and Samaria

I. Their Sins. 1. *Idolatry.* "With their idols have they committed adultery" (ver. 37). Jehovah was to Israel as a husband. To serve other gods was to forsake and forfeit His favour and protection. It was a fearful crime, such as adultery would be in the judgment of all nations. 2. *Cruelty.* "Blood is in their hands." They offered their children to the cruelties of Moloch worship. Idolatry leads to perverted and unnatural views of human duty and of the requirements of religion. Hence the cruelty of its rites. 3. *Impurity.* She sought to make herself attractive to her lovers, using every art to pander to her lust (ver. 41, 42). Israel made herself attractive to the surrounding nations, "For whom thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thy eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments." They washed themselves before men, but were unclean before God—the way of hypocrites. Israel sought for occasions of sin. "Ye have sent for men" (ver. 40). They tried to excite a jaded appetite (ver. 43). They were old and worn out in the service of sin, but tried hard to awaken the impulses of it, to stir up the embers of a smouldering fire. Even in Christian lands, how many serve such impure and cruel gods and even use infamous arts to plunge into the lowest depths of iniquity! "He who serves Venus and Bacchus offers to them also his children."—*(Lange).* And how many, also, become more shameless as they grow old in sin! 4. *Profanity.* They profaned the Sabbath and the sanctury (ver. 38). They employed in the service of idolatry the "incense" and "oil," God's own property, which He had reserved for sacred uses (Exod. xxx. 23-33). More than this, they dared to combine the service of Jehovah with that of idols, thus adding to their sins the boldest and most wicked hypocracy. After they had indulged in the most cruel rites of idolatry, they came "in the same day" into God's sanctuary to defile it. "To run from the harlot-house to God's house, from murder to the place of prayer, from sin to sinning, is not pleasing to God."—*Lange.*

II. Their punishment. 1. *It would be felt to be just even by the heathen nation who inflicted it.* "And the righteous men, they shall judge them." (ver. 45). The Chaldeans had right on their side. They were the righteous instruments of God to execute His vengeance. Even heathen nations looked upon perjury and breach of covenant as fearful crimes. (Ezek. xvii. 15, 16). 2. *It would be a severe, and yet a most fitting punishment.* (vers. 46, 47). The Judgment hour had come, and God's army was ready. "They shall stone

them with stones,"—the punishment of those who commit adultery and shed blood (St. John viii. 5). 3. *It would be effectual.* The punishment would completely cure the evil (ver. 48). It would be a warning example to all (ver. 48). It would bring them to the true knowledge of God (ver. 49). The whole of this chapter illustrates the words of St. Paul, that "the Law entered that the offence might abound" (Rom. v. 20). It would seem as if the presence of God's holy Law served to stir up the proud will of the chosen people to more desperate self-assertion. They sought those sinful alliances with the powers of the world, which seemed to have all the more attraction because they were forbidden. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (St. James iv. 4).

(Verses 36–44.)

1. *Sinners make little or no conscience of horrible sins, or holy duties; they pass from one to the other immediately.* When they had slain their children to their idols, that same day they came into the Sanctuary. From shedding of blood and sacrificing to idols, they step into the temple and worship of God. Had not their consciences been seared, they would have accused them and told them that they were unclean, not fit to meddle with holy things. But they go boldly and impudently into God's presence. So Jeremiah tells us, they did steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, walk after other gods, and then come presently and stand before Him in His house, and say: "We are delivered." (Jer. vii. 9, 10.) They passed from wicked practices to holy duties, making no conscience of the one or the other. 2. *The Lord takes notice how men draw near to Him in the duties of His worship.* They thrust themselves into the temple worship and into the presence of God, as if they had been innocent and as acceptable to God as any. Men may deceive others and themselves, but they cannot deceive the Lord. He sees their spirits, and whether they come unprepared in the guilt of former or present sins. 3. *Profaning of holy things is wronging God.* "This have they done unto Me. Lo, thus have they done in the midst of Mine house." God had instituted their worship, and had stamped holiness upon them; and therefore the defiling and profaning of them He counted the defiling and profaning of His name and of Himself. Three ways, especially, are holy things defiled, profaned: (1.) *When men come in their sins, without purging themselves.* (St. James, iv. 8.) If men draw near to God without cleansing their hands, and purifying their hearts, God will not draw near them. He will not touch unclean things. (2.) *When we mingle aught of us therewith.* Additions of human things are pollutions of divine things When they brought aught into the Temple which God appointed not, then was God's worship defiled. When Nadab and Abihu put strange fire into the censers, they defiled God's worship and provoked Him to their destruction (Lev. x.); and when they set their threshold with God's threshold, they defiled His name and worship (Ezek. xliii. 7, 8). 3. *When holy things are handled irreverently.* The Bethshemites in a rude manner peeped into the ark and profaned it, which caused the Lord to smite them with sudden death (1 Sam. vi. 19). Solomon gives counsel that men should keep their feet when they go into the house of God (Eccl. v. 1). For if they look not well to their affections, they will play the fool, and profane those holy things, and procure a curse instead of a blessing. 4. *Sinners will show great activity in drawing others to themselves and their wicked ways.* These harlots sent to Assyria, to Egypt, and to others to come unto them. They trimmed and decked themselves, they spared not for any cost whereby

they might please and satisfy them. Thus did the harlot (Prov. vii.). She perfumes her bed, trims up herself, goes forth, and diligently seeks, finds, and brings in the prey. Some compass sea and land to make proselytes. Shall wicked ones and wickedness be active, expensive to draw and ruin others, and shall not godly ones and godliness be as active and expensive to win and save sinners? 5. *Those who are given to corporeal or spiritual uncleanness are seldom recovered, but go on and grow old in those sins.* These women had many reproofs and threatenings, but none prevailed (ver. 44). Such sins are bewitching, and hold men captive. "None that go unto her return again" (Prov. ii. 19). 6. *The Lord takes notice of sinners, as to the beginning, progress, and continuance of their sin.* He observed when Aholah began her whoredoms, when the calves were set up at Dan and Bethel, how she grew up and grew old in adulteries. God's eye goes along with sinners, from the beginning to the end. 7. *God's judgments are teaching things.* He brought these judgments upon the two harlots, that all women might be taught thereby. Gideon by thorns and briars taught the men of Succoth (Judg. viii. 16). There is no judgment of God upon any city, nation, or people, but it speaks and teaches: "Hear ye the rod" (Micah. vi. 9); it hath a voice, a teaching voice. 1. It teaches all who are guilty of the same sins, and not visited with the same judgments to admire the goodness and long suffering of God towards them. 2. It teaches those who are guilty of such sins to repent and turn to the Lord, lest the Lord, being now in the way of judgment, should break out also upon them, and make them examples of His justice. 3. It teaches others to fear and to flee from such practices, as being such destructive judgments. When Samaria and Jerusalem shall be destroyed for their confidence in the arm of flesh, will not every other city learn what is the reward of wickedness, and fear to do the like? 8. *God's ways with sinners in judging them righteously brings them to acknowledge the equity of His dealing with them.* When the just punishment of your lewdness and idolatry shall be upon you, "ye shall know that I am the Lord," who observed all your ways, who waited long for your repentance, who have dealt justly with you in all the evils I have brought upon you; you cannot but justify Me, and condemn yourselves.—(*Greenhill*).

The Complete Destruction of Jerusalem predicted, both in Parable and by Sign (Chap. xxiv).

(Vers. 1, 2).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—"On the day on which the King of Babylon commenced the siege and blockade of Jerusalem, this event was revealed by God to Ezekiel on the Chaboras (vers. 1, 2); and he was commanded to predict to the people through the medium of a parable the fate of the city and its inhabitants (vers. 3—14). God then foretold to him the death of his own wife, and commanded him to show no sign of mourning on account of it. His wife died the following evening, and he did as he was commanded. When he was asked by the people the reason of this he explained to them that what he was doing was symbolical of the way in which they were to act when Jerusalem fell (vers. 15—24). The fall would be announced to the prophet by a fugitive, and then he would no longer remain mute, but would speak to the people again (vers. 25—27). Apart, therefore, from the last three verses, this chapter contains the words of God, the first of which unfolds in a parable the approaching calamities, and the result of the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (vers. 1—14); whilst the second typifies by means of a sign the pain and mourning of Israel, namely, of the exiles at

the destruction of the city with its sanctuary and its inhabitants. These two words of God, being connected together by their contents, were addressed to the prophet on the same day, and that, as the introduction (vers. 1, 2) expressly observes, the day on which the siege of Jerusalem by the King of Babylon began."—*(Keil.)*

Ver. 1. "The ninth year." The date is taken from the commencement of of Jehoiachin's captivity, which would fix the time when the word of the Lord came to the prophet as B.C. 590." 'In the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month." This day was afterwards kept as a fast, and is still observed as such by the synagogue.

Ver. 2. "Write thee the name of the day." "The prophet is to write down the day, as a man does with remarkable days, in order not to forget the date. The object, to make use of this afterwards in proof of his prophetic office, needed to be more definitely noticed."—*(Hengstenberg).* "The prophet is specially charged to write down the particular day on which he delivered his message, and to announce it as that on which Nebuchadnezzar had commenced his attack on Jerusalem. As he was at the time at the distance of more than four hundred miles from that city, it was not to be supposed that the intelligence could have reached him by any human means. When, therefore, the captives afterwards received the information, they had, on comparing the dates, an infallible proof of the Divine inspiration of the prophet." —*(Henderson).* "Set himself against Jerusalem." The Hebrew word signifies *to lie hard upon* (Psa. lxxxvii. 7). It is sometimes used to describe the investing of a city with an army. In the afflictions of the righteous God is said to lay on a heavy hand (Psa. xxxii. 4). The sacrificer laid his hand upon the victim (Exodus xxix. 19); and the witnesses were ordered to lay their hand on a blasphemer before he was stoned (Lev. xxiv. 4), so in great judgments God lays on His hand.

HOMILETICS.

The Last Warning of Judgment.

Ezekiel had uttered many warnings before, and he still goes on speaking up to the very moment of judgment. This illustrates :—

I. The Prophet's faithfulness. Amidst every discouragement he is still resolved to deliver the message of God. He will utter God's last word, though it comes too late to arrest judgment. The true prophet must speak the word which is given him, and leave the results with Him who sent him.

II. The Prophet's inspiration. Ezekiel was four hundred miles from Jerusalem, and yet he tells his fellow-captives that the siege was begun at that very moment at which he was speaking. This was a clear proof that the prophet's mind was enlightened by that Sovereign Intelligence which sees and knows all things. He could not possibly know this event by human means. Therefore his assertion, that the siege was then commencing while he was speaking, must have been the result of supernatural knowledge. If any one maintains that this was a prophecy *after* the event, he must be prepared to accept the conclusion that both Ezekiel's prophetic and moral characters fall to the ground.

III. The solemnity of the prophet's last word. In this chapter he takes his farewell of his nation. We are reminded of Our Lord's parting words to Jerusalem, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate" (St. Matt. xxiii. 38). When the prophets of God speak no more to nations, or to individual men, then the day of their visitation is over and the time of judgment has come.

IV. The solemn importance of God's notes of time, in the life of nations, and of men. There are times and events in the lives of nations which historians may note down as the most important. But what different rates of importance are to be assigned to these as God views them! And so it is in regard to the lives of individual men. How different would be the calendar of our lives if we marked the times and events of it at God's bidding! "We are generally ignorant of the real significance of events, which we think we understand. Almost every person can recollect one or more instances, where the whole after-current of his life was turned by some single word, or some incident so trivial as scarcely to fix his notice at the time. On the other hand, many great crises of danger, many high and stirring occasions, in which, at the time, his total being was absorbed, have passed by, leaving no trace of effect on his permanent interests, and have wellnigh vanished from his memory. The conversation of the stage-coach is often preparing results which the solemn assembly and the most imposing and eloquent rites will fail to produce. What countryman, knowing the dairyman's daughter, could have suspected that she was living to a mightier purpose and result than almost any person in the church of God, however eminent? The outward of occasions and duties is, in fact, almost no index of their importance; and our judgments concerning what is great and small are without any certain validity. These terms, as we use them, are, in fact, only words of outward description, not words of definite measurement."—(*Bushwell*).

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1. *The Lord can make known what men do, to whom He pleases and at what distance soever.* Nebuchadnezzar and his forces were in Judea, sitting down before Jerusalem, and this the Lord revealed to Ezekiel, being in Babylon. It was declared to Elisha, whither the king of Syria would march, and where he would pitch his camp. (2 Kings, vi. 9, 10.) The death of Herod, in Judea, was discovered to Joseph, being in Egypt. (St. Matt. ii. 19, 20.) And when Moses was in Midian, the Lord told him that all the men were dead in Egypt, which sought his life. (Exod. iv. 19.) 2. *There are some things and times the Lord would have his people take special notice of, and keep the chronology thereof.* Ezekiel must write the year, the month, and day of Jerusalem's beseiging. When God hath been upon executing great judgments, or showing great mercies, the days and months have been recorded. The day and month of Noah's entrance into the ark, and of his coming out again, are mentioned. (Gen. vii. 11, viii. 14, 16.) The time of the Jews going out of Egypt you have punctually set down. (Exod. xii. 41, 42); so the time of their passing over Jordan (Josh. iv. 19); of Solomon's building the temple (2 Chron. iii. 2); of Haman's plot to destroy the Jews (Esth. iii. 8, 13.) This shows that these events were not casual, that the wisdom and power of God were interested in them, whoever were the instruments."—(*Greenhill.*)

(Verses 3–14.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — The prophet illustrates the destruction of Jerusalem by the allegory of a cauldron which he was to set on the fire, and having put water into it, to boil therein choice pieces of meat (vers 3–5). Then he follows with an application of the allegory to Jerusalem, as describing her irrevocable doom.

Ver. 3. "Utter a parable." "The contents of these verses are called a proverb or parable. It follows from this that the ensuing act which the prophet is commanded to perform is not to be regarded as a symbolical act which he really carried out, but that the act forms the substance of the parable—in other words, belongs to the parable itself; consequently the interpretation of the parable (ver. 10, etc.) is clothed in the form of a thing actually done" (*Keil.*) "Set on a pot . . . pour water into it." The repeated demand expresses urgent haste. The pot is Jerusalem, which had become so foul as to poison all meats which were put into it.

Ver. 4. "The pieces." The pieces represent the inhabitants of Jerusalem. By the "thigh, the shoulder, choice bones," we are to understand the wealthy, the nobles, and chiefs of the people.

Ver. 5. "Burn also the bones under it, and make it boil well." "The bones that had been stripped of their flesh were to be used for fuel: those to which it still adhered were to be thrown into the pot, that it might be boiled" (*Henderson*). "The fire with which they are boiled is the fire of war, and the setting of the pot upon the fire is the commencement of the siege, by which the population of the city is to be boiled away like the flesh and bones in a pot."—*Keil.*

Ver. 6. "Whose scum is therein." "We are not to understand such scum as gathers on the surface of the contents of a pot, but the rust or verdigris contracted by copper. The moral impurity of the city is intended. The prophet begins here to give the explanation of the parable. The Jews, indeed, could be at little loss to know what was intended by it. They had already themselves bandied the metaphor about as a taunt, boasting that they should dwell securely in Jerusalem."—*(Henderson).* "Piece by piece." The pieces were the various members of the body corporate. They were all to be brought out, no favour was to be shown, but all without discrimination were to be put into the cauldron. "Let no lot fall upon it." No lot was to be cast in order to decide what part should be taken, and what should be spared (Nahum iii. 10). *All* are doomed to be carried off, by death or by captivity.

Ver. 7. "She set it upon the top of a rock." "Here we have the cause of this judgment: deeds of murder are done in Jerusalem boldly and without abhorrence, by which we are to understand the numerous judicial murders which were perpetrated by the party who had at that time seized the helm of the state, the party of the external alliances, against which all were indignant, who in the name of the God of Israel raised a protest against this adulterous movement. An example of such judicial murder is the prophet Urijah (Jer. xxvi. 20. &c.)" (*Hengstenberg).* "Poured it not upon the ground." It was commanded in the Law, that the blood of animals slain for food should be poured on the earth and covered up with dust (Lev. xvii. 13). Idolatrous Jerusalem recklessly poured out even human blood under the open sky, and covered it not up. She sinned shamelessly, and before the face of all. Therefore the Lord will not cover up her sin, but her blood shall be ruthlessly poured out in the sight of all nations.

Ver. 8. "Upon the top of a rock." "The Hebrew word signifies a *sunny* rock, the highest part of a bare rock exposed to the rays of the sun. In just retribution, Jehovah declares that He would expose them with equal publicity, that the blood might call for vengeance."—*(Henderson).*

Ver. 10. "Spice it well." "There are differences of opinion as to the meaning of this word. The rendering sometimes given, namely 'to spice,' is at all events unsuitable, and cannot be sustained by the usage of

language. It is true that in Ex. xxx. 25, &c., the verb is used for the preparation of the anointing oil, but it is not the mixing of the different ingredients that is referred to, but in all probability the thorough boiling of the spices, for the purpose of extracting their essence, so that 'thorough boiling' is no doubt the true meaning of the word."—(*Keil*).

Ver. 11. "That the filthiness of it may be molten in it." The uncleanness of the pot is the rust upon it. The impurity and rust of the pot itself must be consumed by the fire. Thus when the guilty inhabitants are slain, the city itself will be destroyed. In the Old Testament, impurity is considered as being attached to things as well as persons (Lev. xviii. 25; xxvii. 28). Leprosy not only polluted men, but clothes also and houses. Thus God's judgments fell not upon men only, but also upon cities and lands.

Ver. 12. "She wearied herself with lies." The idea is, that the pot wearied and exhausted men in their exertions to cleanse it. All the labours spent upon the devoted city were of no avail.

Ver. 14. "I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent." "The impurity of the inhabitants of Jerusalem was of the most atrocious character. It was *crime*, deliberate *wickedness*. Jehovah had used a variety of means, both physical and moral, to restore them to purity, but they had produced no effect. It remained now only for the Chaldeans to do their work. The decree was irrevocable, and the execution inevitable."—(*Henderson*).

HOMILETICS.

The Final Judgments of God upon Jerusalem.

I. They would be severe. The judgments coming upon Jerusalem are set forth under the parable of a boiling pot, filled with flesh and bones and set over a fierce fire. Not only are the contents to be completely destroyed by fire, but also the rust of the pot itself. This declares that God's purpose is to destroy Jerusalem itself as well as the guilty inhabitants (ver. 11). They are to be burned well until the whole is consumed (ver. 10). The blood Jerusalem had shed must now be avenged upon her before the eyes of all nations (ver. 8).

II. They would be a just retribution. For corruption had spread to all ranks and conditions of the people (ver. 4). Sin, like rust, had eaten into the very substance of the nation. The "scum" had cleaved to the vessel (ver. 6). So universal was the corruption that there was no need for the "lot" to be cast in order to decide what part should be taken for destruction, and what spared. *All* were doomed to be carried off, by death, or by captivity. Nor were these judgments a sudden thought, or expedient—a desperate remedy applied at the last moment. They had often been warned and corrected before. God by the ministry of His prophets had effected some reformations, but the effect of these soon wore off and the nation refused to be purged of her iniquity (ver. 13). Holy men were wearied with toil to cleanse the sinful city, but their labours were in vain (ver. 12). She had sinned in the most open and shamless manner, had done nothing to cover her sin, had shown no signs of repentance, and had resisted all the instruments which God had used to restore her. There was nothing arbitrary or vindictive in her punishment, which was but a just recompense for her sin. The city with her sinful population were left to share the inevitable consequences which arise from the persistent breach of moral laws. "Accord-

ing to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord God" (ver. 14). The judgments were to fall upon the city itself as well as upon the inhabitants. The works of man are turned by his sin into the instruments of his punishment. The blood of Christ was shed at Jerusalem, and retribution came, at length, when Titus burned the city. Divine grace abused will bring sure vengeance. Sin must be put away out of God's sight, either by cleansing it away, or by overwhelming it under His dire judgments. When God Himself has done all that could be done, consistent with man's moral liberty, then judgment must take it course. "Thus also it was not cleansed by Christ, who had wearied Himself in labours for Jerusalem even to hot tears."—(*Jerome*).

III. They would be irrevocable. The Lord had spoken, and He would not repent of His word (ver. 14). Their time of grace had run out.

"As to the principle of dealing, there is no essential difference between what God did then with Israel, and what He still does with those who stand in a similar relation to Him, and pursue a similar course. Where there is the profession of a belief in God's word, and a regard to God's authority, though intermingled with much that is false in sentiment, or unrighteous in conduct, there must still be dealings of severity and rebuke, to bring the professor, if possible, to a sense of his sinfulness, and lead him to renounce it; but, failing this, to vindicate concerning him the righteousness of God, and leave him without excuse if iniquity should prove his ruin. In the case of sincere, God-fearing people, the severity exercised will always be attended with salutary results; for they have the root of the matter in them, and are sure to profit by the chastening of the Lord. But with those who have the profession only, without the principle of true godliness, the iniquity is clung to in spite of all the severity that is exercised, until the wrath falls on them to the uttermost. There may be signs of the Divine displeasure sufficient to startle the tender conscience, and call for deep humiliation of spirit, while nothing appears outwardly wrong, and all may even wear a smiling aspect as far as regards social and public relations. Should there be a restraining of Divine grace within, an absence of spiritual refreshment, a felt discomfort of mind, or an obvious withdrawal of spiritual privileges, there is beyond doubt the commencement of a work of judgment; and if such marks of God's displeasure are slighted, others of a more severe and alarming kind may assuredly be looked for. But as men's tempers and circumstances in life are infinitely varied, so there is a corresponding variety in the methods employed by God to check the risings of sin, and expel its poison from the heart. And it is the part of spiritual wisdom to seek for the wakeful ear and the discerning eye, which may enable one to catch even the earliest intimations of God's displeasure, and so improve these as to render unnecessary the heavier visitations of wrath."—(*Fairbairn.*)

(Vers. 15–27.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—"With a view to affect more deeply the minds of his fellow-captives Ezekiel had announced to him the disseverance of the tenderest of all earthly ties—the removal of her on whom he had ever been accustomed to look with affection and delight. This removal of his beloved wife was to be effected by *a stroke*, *i.e.*, in so sudden and striking a manner as to show that it was an immediate visitation of God. Distressing, however, as this event would be, the prophet is commanded to exhibit no tokens of grief on the occasion."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 16. "**The desire of thine eyes.**" Heb. "The delight of thine eyes,"—thus describing the prophet's wife. *A stroke.* A sudden death inflicted by God. The word is the same as that which is rendered "plague" (Num. xiv. 37; xvii. 13; 2 Sam. xxiv. 21, 25).

Ver. 17. "**Forbear to cry.**" Heb. "Be silent." The prophet was to check the emotions which he would naturally feel. They are to be repressed by a solemn sense of God's having interposed (Lev. x. 7; xxi. 10, 12; Psa. xxxix. 9). "**Make no mourning for the dead.**" "Though the High Priest was interdicted mourning for any person whatever (Lev. xxi. 10), the ordinary priests were permitted to mourn for near relatives (Lev. xxi. 2, 3). Ezekiel, therefore, though of priestly descent, would have been under no restriction in this respect. He was, however, on the present occasion, though of the most trying nature, to appear as usual, not laying aside his turban and instead of it casting ashes on his head, nor going barefooted, nor covering the upper lip together with its moustachio (Lev. xiii. 45; Mic. iii. 7). Neither was he to partake of the food which it was customary for friends to bring in token of their sympathy with the mourners. This in the original is called *bread of men, i.e.*, what men usually furnish on such occasions."—*(Henderson.)* "By the *bread of men* is meant that bread which the people were accustomed to send to the house of mourning in cases of death, to manifest their sympathy and to console and refresh the mourners, a custom which gave rise in the course of time to that of formal funeral meals. These are not mentioned in the Old Testament; but the sending of bread or food to the house of mourning is clearly referred to in Deut. xxvi. 14; Hos. ix 4; Jer. xvi. 7.—*(Keil.)*

Ver. 18. "**I did in the morning as I was commanded.**" On the morning following the death of his wife.

Ver. 21. "**I will profane My sanctuary.**" The profanation of the temple would be accomplished by its destruction. "**The excellency of your strength.**" "Israel based its might and strength upon the temple as the scene of the gracious presence of God, living in the hope that the Lord would not give up his sanctuary to the heathen to be destroyed, but would defend the temple, and therewith Jerusalem and its inhabitants (Jer. vii. 4)" *(Keil).* "**Your sons and your daughters.**" "Many parents might, when they were carried away from Jerusalem, have been under the necessity of leaving their children of tender age behind them. These the Chaldeans should mercilessly put to the sword."—*Henderson.*

Ver. 23. "**Ye shall pine away for your iniquities.**" The thought of their personal guilt would swallow up all the sorrows of bereavement. They would be made to feel that their own sins had brought all this overwhelming trouble upon them. "**Mourn one toward another.**" "Though prevented, by the circumstances in which they were placed in the land of their conquerors, from making any public manifestation of their sorrow, they would privately *one to another* give expression to their feelings of grief." —*Henderson.*

Ver. 24. "**Thus Ezekiel is a sign unto you.**" "It is not an unexampled thing for the sacred writers to introduce their own names into their productions (Ex. ii. 11; Num. xii. 3; Is. xx. 3; Dan. viii. 27). Ezekiel was *a sign* or significant typical representation, foreshadowing what was to take place in the experience of his countrymen. When the thing signified should happen, it would be an indubitable proof that Jehovah had revealed the event beforehand to his servant."—*(Henderson).*

Ver. 25. **Their strength.** The word means rather "stronghold" or "fortress." This was the temple in

which they trusted, forgetting their true "fortress-rock" (Is. xvii. 10).

Ver. 26. "In that day." This, like the expression "in the day," in ver. 25, refers to that day in which the temple was destroyed and the fugitive made his escape.

Ver. 27. "In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped." "The day is referred to on which the fugitive arrived at the Chebar with the melancholy news. From the time of the temple's actual destruction until this messenger should arrive the prophet ceased from his public labours, meanwhile leaving his predictions to produce their natural effect; but then he was again to stand forth, and pointedly appeal to the issue in proof of his divine commission."—*(Henderson).*

HOMILETICS.

JERUSALEM'S DESTRUCTION TYPIFIED BY THE DEATH OF EZEKIEL'S WIFE.

Ezekiel himself is now to be a "sign" unto them by his personal calamities and sorrows. He was a highly gifted man, and called to an honourable office, but corresponding to this height of privilege is a depth of sorrow. The chosen symbol of Jerusalem's destruction was to be the occasion of pain and grief to him. But he is taught to set the claims of his duty and of his office higher than those of natural affection. His bereavement is here regarded rather in its bearing on public utility than on his domestic happiness. It is as a man of sorrows that he shall accomplish his prophetic mission. In his deepest afflictions he shall be powerful, as never before, to arouse the people to repentance. His ministry, like that of a greater Prophet, exemplifies the power of the Cross. The death of Ezekiel's wife is here regarded as a type of the destruction of the city.

I. It would be a manifest visitation of God. "Son of man, behold I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke" (ver. 16.) The hand of God was to be specially evident. "A stroke," implying an action directed by an intelligent will; a calamity also sudden, like that of the pestilence which walketh in darkness. "In the day" (ver. 25), the time of judgment was fixed. The destruction of the devoted city would be brought about, not by the accidents of history as men count them, but by the evident working of God's will. The prophet had long known of the Divine purpose. For five years he had prophesied in dumb show, by parable, and by allegory of the final destruction of Jerusalem. Everything possible had been done to show the hand of God plainly revealed in this solemn work of judgment. Thus all will be forced at length to acknowledge the prophet's Divine mission.

II. It would be an overwhelming sorrow. "Neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down" (ver. 16). The prophet is also forbidden to observe the sad customs of the house of mourning (ver. 17). The "sign" was to be the most solemn and expressive of all,—the sign of a silent sorrow. The grief would prove too deep for tears, too serious for the outward trappings of woe. It is a common saying, that "there is no sorrow like a dry sorrow." It is saddest of all when the burden of the heart can find no relief in tears.

II. It would bring home to them the greatness of their sin. The prophet's silent sorrow was a type of the fact that his guilty nation would be brought

solemnly to acknowledge that God had interposed. When His hand is made bare in judgment, the confession must be, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it" (Psa. xxxix. 9). The inhabitants of the city would be overcome with such a sense of guilt that it would swallow up every thought of bereavement (ver. 23). They would now begin to receive the prophet's message seriously, asking the question in solemn earnestness, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us?" (ver. 19). They now begin to learn that the prophet is a "sign" unto them. Not only his words, but the stern realities of his life bear witness for God. The ruin of their city, now plainly seen to be a just judgment of God, would be an all-absorbing topic of conversation. They would be able to talk of nothing else, but "mourn one towards another" (ver. 23). They would believe a human messenger when he comes to tell them a disastrous piece of news (ver. 26). Thus they are compelled by stern facts to accept the prophet's message, though they had long refused to believe him.

IV. It would bring them to the true knowledge of God (ver. 27). The prophet had revealed the mind and will of God, but he was not believed. Now he shall speak with a power of instant conviction, for the messenger of evil tidings has arrived with news of the judgments which he had so long threatened in vain. He had laid before them the *principles* of righteousness, but now these are wrought out in stern *facts* to which they must listen. His words are now corroborated by a human messenger (ver. 27). Thus the solemn realities of things, the solemnities of judgment must, sooner or later, be brought home to impenitent sinners, "Thou shalt be a sign unto them, and they shall know that I am the Lord."

(Vers. 19—24.)

1. *The resting in holy things, causes God to remove them, how dear soever they be unto us.* "I will profane My sanctuary." You confide in the outward means, you are taken with the outward splendour of the ceremonies and pomp of the Temple, but the spiritual true worship ye mind not. The temple, city and state are dearer to you than I am. Why is the Temple, and not My-self, "the excellency of your strength?" Why is that "the desire of your eyes," and not Myself, who fill the Temple with My glory? Why are you troubled that it should be laid in the dust, and care not that My honour, My glory, My name are profaned amongst you! 2. *Men's sins sometimes bring them into such straits that though they have lost their dearest comforts, yet they dare not outwardly manifest sorrow for them.* It was sad to lose their dearest comforts, and more sad that they might not ease their hearts by tears or sighings, and most sad that they must show no respect to their dead friends by any funeral rites. Jeremiah had predicted this sad condition (Jer. xvi. 6, 7). 3. *God may put His own faithful servants upon hard and unwonted things, thereby to declare what shall be the condition of the wicked.* "Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign." He hath not been suffered to mourn or weep; and why so? that he may be a sign unto you. You would not be taught by his doctrine, now you must be taught by his example; "according to all that he hath done shall ye do." The things are harsh and unnatural that I (Ezekiel) have done, but it is for your sakes that I am put upon them; and ye shall do as I have done. Thus Isaiah was a sign (Isa. xx. 3). 4. *Signs accomplished convince men of the truth and just proceedings of God.* By the fulfilling of this sign foretold, ye shall be so convinced as to acknowledge Ezekiel was a true sign, made so by Me, and that I have dealt justly with you for your iniquities, in bringing you into such straits, as not to dare to mourn openly for your miseries. If Ezekiel have

nothing to object against Me, from whom, being innocent, I took away the desire of his eyes, and forbade him to mourn for her; what can you object against Me, being so guilty as none more, if I send away your desirable things, and hem you about with my judgments and enemies, that you shall not dare to mourn?—*Greenhill.*

PREDICTIONS OF JUDGMENTS UPON THE AMMONITES, MOABITES, EDOMITES, AND PHILISTINES. (Chap. XXV.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—In chs. XXV.-XXXii, we come to a new group of prophecies. They are predictions of judgment upon the heathen nations.

"While the prophet's mouth was to be mute to Israel, the Lord directed him to speak against the heathen nations, and to foretell to them the judgment of destruction, that they might not be lifted up by the fall of the people and kingdom of God, but might recognise in the judgment upon Israel a work of the Omnipotence and righteousness of the Lord, the Judge of the whole earth. There are seven heathen nations whose destruction Ezekiel foretells in this section of his book, viz., (1) Ammon; (2) Moab; (3) Edom; (4) the Philistines (ch. xxv); (5) Tyre; (6) Sidon (ch. xxvi.-xxviii); and (7) Egypt (ch. xxix.-xxxii). These prophecies are divided into thirteen words of God by the introductory formula, 'the word of Jehovah came to me,' the utterances against Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Philistines, being all comprehended in one word of God whereas there are four separate words of God directed against Tyre, one against Sidon, and seven against Egypt. In the seven nations and the seven words of God directed against Egypt we cannot fail to discover an allusion to the symbolical significance of the number. And in order to make it the more apparent that the number has been chosen on account of its significance, Ezekiel divides his announcement of the judgment upon the seventh people into seven words of God. On the basis of Gen. i., seven is the number denoting the completion of the works of God. When therefore, Ezekiel selects seven nations and utters seven words of God concerning the principal nation, namely Egypt, he evidently intends to indicate thereby that the judgment predicted will be executed and completed upon the heathen world and its peoples through the word and acts of God."—*(Keil).*

(Vers. 1-17).

Ver. 3. "**The Ammonites . . . Because thou saidst, Aha, against My sanctuary, when it was profaned,**" etc. "They were the descendants of Lot, and occupied the territory to the east of the Jordan, beyond that pertaining to the tribes of Reuben and Gad. They formed one of the most powerful of the minor neighbouring states, and were frequently at war with the Hebrews. They were gross idolaters, and had for their national God Moloch or Milcom. On the fall of Jerusalem, to which as auxiliaries they contributed, and the transportation of the inhabitants of Judea to Babylon, they insolently triumphed over them, on which account the present threatening is denounced against them."—*(Henderson).*

Ver. 4. "**I will deliver thee to the men of the East for a possession.**" "The *men of the East* are the inhabitants of Arabia Deserta, east of the territories immediately bordering on the Jordan and the Dead Sea. On the destruction of the Jewish state by Nebuchadnezzar, the country was to be taken possession of by the nomadic tribes, who should there form their encampments and dwell in their tents, leading the same pastoral life to which they had

been accustomed." — *(Henderson.)*

"Palaces." The Heb. word never means "palaces," but only "villages," or "folds." These were nomadic encampments, surrounded by mud walls, as is common in the East. "Thy fruit . . . thy milk." Besides the produce of the soil, the milk is also mentioned as one of the products of a pastoral life, and the principal food of nomads.

Ver. 5. "Rabbah." This was the metropolis of the Ammonites. It is elsewhere called *Rabbah of Ammon* to distinguish it from a city of that name in the tribe of Judah. Ptolemy rebuilt it and gave it the name of Philadelphia. "A stable for camels." The city rebuilt by Ptolemy was in ruins in the fourteenth century. These have been visited by modern travellers, who have found remains of a palace, a mausoleum, an ampitheatre, a temple, a church, and a castle, but they could not discover a single inhabited dwelling. Burckhardt found a party of Arabs there, who had stabled their camels among the ruins.

Ver. 7. "I will cause thee to perish out of the countries: I will destroy thee." "This desolate state of Rabbah must be referred to the three hundred years which intervened between the destruction of Jerusalem and the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus, after which it became celebrated among the Greeks and Romans, by whom, no doubt, the splendid buildings, the ruins of which still remain, were erected." *—(Henderson.)*

Ver. 8. "Moab and Seir do say, Behold the house of Judah is like unto all the heathen." They had forgotten that nine centuries before this a king of Moab had been told by a Gentile seer, that Israel should "dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations." (Num. xxiii. 9.)

Ver. 9. "I will open the side of Moab." The mountain passes would be cleared, which were otherwise closed and fortified. Thus the enemy could easily enter the country and take possession.

Ver. 12. "Revenged himself upon them." "The old spirit of revenge, in which he had acted from the olden time, still keeps by his side. While in the more distant relationship of Ammon and Moab, malignant joy is the expression of hostile feeling, with Edom, in his much nearer relationship, the same feeling vents itself in actions of revenge. Hence the charge of sinful procedure as the incurring of guilt."—*(Lange.)*

Ver. 15. "Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge." "The Philistines are in ver. 15 joined by Edom on the side of their *doing* (ver. 12, &c.); to Ammon-Moab on account of their *contempt* of the people of God. The latter was the inmost feeling, hostility the impelling force, wherein the distinction from Edom lay. "To destroy it for the old hatred." This is the design, the abiding tendency. The everlasting enmity reached back to the earliest days. A perpetually enduring war is the standing feature of the relation, while fixed hostility was the root of it."—*(Lange.)*

Ver. 16. "I will cut off the Cherethims." "The name Philistines signifies probably the emigrants, in accordance with the accounts of the books of Moses concerning their migration from the regions on the Black Sea. By the side of this name goes, of substantially like signification for the same people, Kerethim, extirpated —those who were forced to leave their native land. These Kerethim are now become Kerethim a second time; their name shall verify itself anew. The destruction of the remnant points to this, that they shall be destroyed to the last man, as in fact the Philistines have utterly disappeared. It is the great privilege of the people of God, that how heavy soever the judgments of God may be upon them, never will it be said of them, I will destroy the remnant."—*(Hengstenberg.)*

HOMILETICS.

THE PROPHECIES AGAINST HEATHEN NATIONS.

I. Heathen nations formed the dark background to Israel. In the spiritual darkness in which they dwelt, we may trace different shades. Ammon, Moab, Edom, in their order, represent increasing blackness of darkness, until we come to the full depths of it in the Philistines. These heathen nations were a source of continual danger to the people of God. The Church of God is ever surrounded by the world; a world which exhibits every gradation of evil, coarse, refined; the devil rough and blustering, or as an angel of light. In the case of the three first nations mentioned by the prophet, their guilt was enhanced by their relationship to Israel. "The people of God must undergo the experience which the man of God undergoes (Matt. x. 36, Mic. vii. 6). Out of his blood-relationships there springs a hostility even to blood. While this revolves around the Spirit that wrought in Israel, it could not but finally array itself against the Messiah, as He has Himself said that we shall be hated for His name's sake."—*(Lange).*

II. Heathen nations had sinned against Israel. *Ammon,* by profane mocking at their calamities (vers. 3-6). *Moab,* by a false estimate of Israel's spiritual position. "The house of Israel is like unto all the heathen" (ver. 8). They could not understand that it was impossible that Israel should ever become as the heathen (Ez. xx, 32). Israel would have more r sponsibility than the rest of the nations, as she would sin against the light. *Edom,* "by taking vengeance" (ver. 12). *The Philistines,* by an old and deeply-rooted hatred towards Israel (ver 15).

III. Heathen nations have responsibilities towards God. They were not held so strictly responsible as those who had more light and privilege, yet they were not in such total and unrelieved darkness as to render them inexcusable. 1. *They were capable of hearing and receiving God's message.* "Hear the word of the Lord" (ver. 3). They had some knowledge of what righteousness was. They had a conscience to which an appeal might be made. 2. *They were capable of forming judgments on the subject of religion.* We mean religion in the sense of Godliness, and including all duty. The heathen nations knew that Israel was punished for her sins against God. They rejoiced over her fall (ver. 3). They thought that all these calamities disproved their claim to be the people of God. A Gentile seer (probably of Edomite extraction) was, long ago, struck with the conviction that the nation was holy (Num. xxiii. 10). The surrounding heathen nations felt that they were not as Israel when Israel was right with God. 3. *They were capable of the knowledge of God.* "And they shall know that I am the Lord" (ver. 17). They would be made to know God through His manifest judgments.

IV. God's treatment of heathen nations shows His purpose of salvation concerning all mankind. It was no true victory that the heathen nations obtained over Israel. Though to all outward seeming Israel was about to be numbered with dead empires, yet she would rise again in a more glorious form, and become the life and light of the nations. Her disasters and failures would serve but to prepare the way for God's kingdom. The Gentile nations would, in the course of Providence, be made to see that the chosen people were preserved for the salvation of the world.

The Fall of Tyre. (Chap. xxvi.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—"In four sections, commencing with the formula, 'Thus saith the Lord,' Tyre, the mistress of the sea is threatened with destruction. In the first strophe (vers. 2-6) there is a general threat of its destruction by a host of nations. In the second (vers. 7-14), the enemy is mentioned by name, and designated as a powerful one; and the conquest and destruction emanating from him are circumstantially described. In the third (vers. 15-18), the impression which this event would produce upon the inhabitants of the islands and coast-lands is depicted. And in the fourth (vers. 19-21), the threat is repeated in an energetic manner, and the prophecy is thereby rounded off."—*(Keil).*

Ver. 1. **"In the eleventh year, in the first day of the month."** The year is that of Jerusalem's capture, B.C. 588. The month is not named. Probably it was the woeful "fourth" month (2 Kings xxv. 3; Ezek. iii. 15).

Ver. 2. **"The gates of the people."** The plural noun denotes one gate, as the verb is in the singular. Jerusalem was named "the gate of the peoples" on account of the many nations which would flow into it (Isa. ii. 2; Mic. iv. 1). Jerusalem was also to Tyre the gate of communication with the East. **"She is turned unto me."** The rendering should be, "it is turned unto me," *i.e.*, the gate of the peoples. "Tyre considers herself the heiress of Jerusalem. The fall of the spiritual centre presents to view the enhanced importance of the secular."—*(Hengstenberg.)*

Ver. 3. **"As the sea causeth his waves."** Tyre suffered from successive waves of invasion, chiefly those of Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander, the Crusaders and the Saracens. It was not finally overthrown till the thirteenth century, yet it never recovered from the blow which the King of Babylon inflicted upon it.

Ver. 4. **"I will also scrape the dust from her."** "The destruction here referred to was that of the towers, walls, and other edifices, destroyed by the besiegers. Not a vestige was to remain. In place of splendid edifices and impregnable bulwarks nothing was to be seen but bare rocks, fit only for fishermen to spread their nets on."—*(Henderson.)*

Ver. 5. **"The spreading of nets."** According to Dr. Robinson, the southern side of the rock of Tyre is still used by fishermen for this purpose.

Ver. 6. **"Her daughters."** Her daughter-cities, such as Gebal, Beyrout, &c. "By the 'field' we are to understand the open country, *i.e.*, the towns and villages dependent upon her and lying back from and along the coast. These were to be involved in the same catastrophe with the mother-city, their fate was bound up in hers."—*(Henderson.)*

Ver. 8. **"The buckler."** "Here obviously denotes the *testudo*, or vaulted roof of large united shields employed by an attacking enemy for protection in siege-operations."—*Henderson.*

Ver. 11. **"Strong garrisons."** The proper meaning of the word is "pillars," such as were erected in honour of the idol-gods. In the temple of Melkarth at Tyre, there were two famous pillars; one of topaz, the other of emerald.

Ver. 14. **"Thou shalt be built no more."** "This was literally fulfilled with respect to the continental city. That part which lay on the island recovered itself after the lapse of seventy years, as predicted by the prophet Isaiah (Ch. xxiii. 17, 18), and was in a very flourishing condition in the time of Alexander, by whom a causeway was constructed between the shore and it, by means of which he reached the city, and took it by storm after a siege of seven months."—*Henderson.*

Ver. 15. "The isles." "This term is frequently used so as to embrace the coast lands of the Mediterranean Sea; we have therefore to understand it here as applied to the Phoenician colonies on the islands and coasts of that sea."—*(Keil).* Her numerous maritime colonies looked up to Tyre as the mother city. Even Carthage sent her a yearly offering.

Ver. 16. "The princes of the sea." "These are not kings of the islands, but, according to Isa. xxiii. 8, the merchants presiding over the colonies of Tyre, who resembled princes. 'Their thrones,' not royal thrones, but chairs, as in 1 Sam. iv. 13, etc. The picture of their mourning recalls the description in Jonah iii. 6. The antithesis introduced is a very striking one: clothing themselves in terrors, putting on terrors in the place of the robes of state which they have laid aside. The thought is rendered still more forcible by the closing sentences of the verse. They tremble 'by moments,' *i.e.*, as the moments return—actually, therefore, 'every moment' (Isa. xxvii. 3)."—*(Keil).*

Ver. 17. "Strong in the sea." "This feature of the description must be referred to the insular part of the city, which had been strongly fortified as the port for the protection of the warehouses and the shipping. The concluding clause is descriptive of the despotic rule which the merchant-princes of Tyre exercised over the inhabitants, whether regular citizens or those who were there temporarily on business."—*Henderson.*

Ver. 20. "With them that descend into the pit." "The disappearance of Tyre is compared to that of the dead, who, placed in their sepulchre, are no more seen among the living. While this was to be the fate of that renowned city, Jehovah promises to set *glory* in the land of the living. Some refer this to the restoration of the Jewish polity. And if this is meant to include the Messiah and His spiritual kingdom, for whose introduction that restoration was designed to be preparatory, the interpretation may readily be admitted."—*Henderson.*

Ver. 21. "I will make thee a terror, and thou shalt be no more." "The desolation of Tyre was to be so complete that it should be an object of terror to all who approached the spot where it had stood. Not a vestige of it was to remain: a prophecy which was literally fulfilled, for though insular Tyre afterwards rose into notice, the ancient continental city never recovered from her ruin."—*Henderson.*

HOMILETICS.

TYRE THREATENED WITH JUDGMENT.

Tyre rose to her greatest eminence under the reign of Hiram, the friend of David and of Solomon. The time, therefore, of her highest prosperity corresponded with that of Jerusalem. If each of these two cities had been faithful to its high calling, the issue would have been glorious. The Bride of the Messiah would have been worthy of her Lord, and the daughter of Tyre would have brought her gifts sincere and acceptable. But both cities fell, Jerusalem by aspiring after worldly splendour, and Tyre by pride gendered by her commercial greatness. In this Chapter, the overthrow of Tyre is foretold, and in the two following chapters, her world-wide commerce and the nature of her sin are more particularly described. As described in this chapter, we consider:—

1. Her crowning sin. The judgment of Tyre was the result of many forms of sin, but there were two leading sins on which the prophet here dwells. 1. *The*

sin of insulting the chosen people. Tyre rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem, instead of reading the lessons of a warning example. 2. *The sin of intense selfishness.* Tyre glories in the prospect of becoming great through the downfall of Jerusalem, "I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste" (verse 2). To feast upon the prospect of becoming rich through the ruin of others, is the vilest form of selfishness.

II. Her judgment. God was against Tyre (ver. 3), and whatsoever He opposes must come to nought. Mark the special features of her judgment. 1. *She is taken at her own word.* Tyre expected that the nations would come to her, now that the gateway of her communication with the East is thrown open. But they shall, indeed, come to her, yet in a way in which she least expected. "I will cause many nations to come up against thee" (ver. 3). 2. *That in which she most trusted becomes the chief source of her terror.* The sea was the great source of her wealth, and to it she looked for her future stability and prosperity. Yet on the sea would God work His wonders of judgment for her destruction (vers. 5, 14). 3. *The judgment on her would be awful in its completeness.* Tyre would become like the bare rock upon which nothing was left (vers. 4, 5), like dead cities and nations of the earth (ver. 20). She was to be "no more," but the memory of her would be a "terror" to after ages (ver. 21). Her destruction would not be the work of one sharp moment, but would be like the successive waves of the sea, slow but irresistible, which would be a lengthening of her calamity (ver. 3). Tyre had mocked Jerusalem, but she herself shall be mocked in turn (ver. 17). God's retribution is visited often in kind as well as in degree. Her goods are to be destroyed, and her pleasures, and all her glory laid in the dust (vers. 12, 13). What a picture of the end of all things on earth! The believer has the enduring substance, which cannot be taken by the spoiler nor corroded by the tooth of time. 4. *The instrument of the judgment.* Nebuchadnezzar, who for this purpose was the servant of God. And God can use what instruments He pleases in His works of judgment or of mercy. 5. *Yet God would bring glory out of the judgment.* "I shall set glory in the land of the living" (ver. 20). The "beauty" of Tyre should disappear like that of Moab (Ezek. xxv. 9), like that of ancient Israel (Ezek. xx. 6, 15), like that of Babylon (Isa. xiii. 19); yet from their ashes a higher and a better life should spring. The Redeemer of the world came upon the wreck of the world's hopes. Human history is a continued example of growth out of corruption and decay. When pagan Rome was destroyed, then Christian Rome arose; and when Christian Rome became corrupt, then God raised His church out of it, once more investing her with the glory of that liberty wherewith Christ hath made her free.

(Vers. 15–21.)

1. *God, by His destructive judgments upon great states makes others to tremble that were secure.* When the Lord drowned the Egyptians in the Red Sea, it caused the nations to fear. (Ex. xv. 14). And when he brought destruction upon Babylon, it made all hearts melt, and they were full of fears and pains, as a woman in travail. (Isa. xiii. 6–8.) 2. *Great cities have their periods, they abide not for ever.* As they have a time to come into the world, so a time to go out of it; as they have a time to get up on high, so a time to descend low. Tyre had her day to fall, her day of departure (ver. 18), she descended into the pit with the people of old time (ver. 20.) Babylon had its time to begin (Gen. xi. 8), and its time to cease (Isa. xiv. 4.) You may

read of Nineveh's raising (Gen. x. 11.), and of her desolation (Nah. iii. 7; Zeph. ii. 13.) Hence we may see the instability of human things. Learn not to trust in strong holds, neither think it any great privilege to be citizens of such perishing cities, but labour to be citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the city prepared of God, and hath foundations which shall never be razed (Heb. xi. 10—16). 3. *God's people are glorious, and the glory of the land.* They are His glory (Isa. iv. 5; Zech. ii. 8). The godly ones were the glory of Zion (Isa. vi. 13). The saints are a holy seed, the substance and the glory of any nation. 4. *There is a difference of lands in the world, all are not alike.* There is "the land of the living." In Canaan there were the living waters, the ordinances and means of grace and salvation which other lands had not. David judged himself even among the dead when he was shut out from the people, the worship, and the ordinances of God; his soul fainted and he was almost gone (Psa. lxxxiv. 2). 5. *God's people may be deprived of their privileges and comforts for a season, but He will in due time restore them to the enjoyment of the same.* "I shall set glory in the land of the living." God's glory, His people were in Babylon, but He would not lose nor leave His glory there. He brought them back again, and "set them in the land of the living." He gave them another temple, all those ordinances and privileges they had before. "I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory" (Isa. xlvi. 13).—*(Greenhill.)*

Tyre's Former Greatness, suggesting a Lamentation over Her Sad Downfall (Chap. xxvii.).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—"The lamentation commences with a picture of the glory of the city of Tyre, its situation, its architectural beauty, its military strength and defences (vers. 3-11), and its wide commercial relations (vers. 12-25); and then passes into mournful lamentation over the ruin of all this glory (vers. 26-36)."—*Keil.*

Vers. 1-11. Introduction and description of the glory and might of Tyre.

Ver. 3. "At the entry of the sea." This should be rendered, "by the entrances of the sea." The description is that of insular Tyre with her two harbours, one on the north and the other on the south. The former was called the Sidonian harbour, because it was on the Sidonian side; and the latter the Egyptian, because of the direction in which it pointed. "A merchant of the people for many isles." Rather, "the peoples unto." Tyre is thus described as the mercantile emporium of the peoples of many sea coasts, both from the East and from the West. Thus Isaiah describes her as, "a mart of nations" (Isa. xxiii. 3).

Ver. 5. "They have made all thy ship boards of fir trees." In vers. 4-8, Tyre is described as a stately ship built of the best material, manned with the best marines and most skilful pilots. The allegory is broken off in the middle of ver. 9, but it is resumed in ver. 26, where this noble ship so well furnished and managed by able hands is at last wrecked in tempestuous seas.

Ver. 7. "Broidered work." Devices were worked in the sails, so that they served also for the purpose of ensigns.

Ver. 10. "They set forth thy comeliness." The meaning is, that Tyre must feel herself honoured in having so many nations to supply her with hired soldiers. The commercial greatness of the city rested upon a military basis.

Vers. 12–25. A description of the commerce of Tyre with all nations who delivered their productions in the market of this metropolis of the commerce of the world, and received the wares and manufactures of this city in return.

Ver. 12. "Tarshish." This was "Tartessus," in Spain, famed for its various metals, which were mostly exported to Tyre. It is probable that most of the "tin" was conveyed by the Phœnicians from Cornwall to Tarshish. "The enumeration of the different peoples, lands, and cities which carried on trade with Tyre commences with Tarshish in the extreme west, then turns to the north, passes through the different lands of Anterior Asia and the Mediterranean to the remotest north-east, and ends by mentioning Tarshish again, to round off the list."—*Keil.*

Ver. 13. "Traded in the persons of men." They were addicted to the slave-trade. To this day the Turkish harems are supplied with female slaves from Circassia and Georgia, such being remarkable for their beauty. Compare Joel. iii. 6.

Ver. 14. "House of Togarmah." "The northern Armenians, who call themselves the house of *Torgom*, and claim Torgom, or Togarmah, the son of Gomer, as their founder. (Gen. x. 3; I. Chron. i. 6.) They inhabit the rough mountainous regions on the south side of the Caucasus. The country was celebrated for its breed of horses, which were in great request by the Persian kings."—(*Henderson*).

Ver. 15. "Denda." "An island, or commercial town in the Persian Gulf, established by the Tyrians to secure the trade of India, which abounded in ivory. The tusks resembling horns will account for the term being here employed." "Ebony." "Gesenius thinks the reason why this word is plural in the Hebrew, is that it was obtained only in planks split into pieces for transportation. Its great hardness made it an article of value."—(*Henderson.*)

Ver. 25. "The ships of Tarshish." "The prophet now returns from his enumeration of the various articles of commerce with which Tyre enriched herself, and the various countries with which she traded, to commemorate her fall. But just before entering upon that part of his subject, he stops for a moment to advert to her navy, by which her wares were conveyed to Spain and other coasts of the Mediterranean. The ships of Tarshish were, comparatively speaking, like our old Indiamen. They are called the *walls* of Tyre, for the same reason that we speak of our ships of war as the wooden walls of Old England. They were the glory and defence of the merchant city." —(*Henderson*).

Ver. 26. "The east wind hath broken thee in the midst of the seas." This wind, blowing from the direction of Lebanon, is the most violent of all in the Mediterranean (Psa. xlviii. 8) Nebuchadnezzar is represented under this figure.

Ver. 31. "They shall make themselves utterly bald for thee." Alluding to the Phœnician custom in mourning, which, on account of its connection with heathenish superstitions, was forbidden to Israel (Deut. xiv. 1).

Ver. 32. "In the midst of the sea." Thus showing that the prophecy is to be understood of insular Tyre.

Ver. 33. "Thou didst enrich the kings of the earth." The custom dues levied on her wares were a source of wealth to the surrounding nations.

Ver. 36. "The people shall hiss at thee." With the hiss of astonishment, as in 1 Kings ix. 8.

HOMILETICS.

(Vers. 1-10).

When Tyre rejoices over Jerusalem, then the prophet rejoices over Tyre: this is the recompense of the pious. If *we* must not repay evil with evil, there still is with God a recompensing of evil with evil. All human and earthly things go out at last in lamentation. This is the lamentation of the spirit, that the world sows to the flesh, and of the flesh reaps corruption. With kettle-drums and flutes the world begins, but it ends with wailing and misery. "We must profoundly know the *gloria mundi*, if we are to take to heart the *sic transit gloria mundi*."—*(Hengstenberg).* Let no one boast of his strength or worldly elevation; how soon can the Lord, if His judgment should break forth, bring all to the dust of desolation! (Vers. 3, 4; Jer. ix. 23, 25). There is a perfection of beauty which is nothing else than ripeness for judgment. Beauty is a transient splendour, but the knowledge of the eternal, leads from glory to glory. In boasting one sees what things the heart is full of. Mark the contrast between Tyre and the daughter of the king, who is all beautiful within (Psa. xlv.). The security is very different: one is of faith, since we know that we are reconciled through Christ, and, even if the world should fall in ruin, can remain in peace; the other proceeds from unbelief, which has respect to men, walls, etc., and relies upon these. The buildings of men, and the building of God, namely, His church, against which not even the gates of hell can prevail. When people once surrender themselves to pride, pomp, and dissipation, they can hardly lay them aside again; nay, they often know not, from inconsideration and wantonness, what they should do (Deut. xxxii. 15, etc.). Every land has its peculiar gift from God, and the gifts of God must thus shamefully minister to the vanity of men. It is quite right to take into one's service and pay qualified persons, but woe to him who makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord!

(Vers. 12-25).

Men run through the wide world for the sake of merchandise, while the word of God, which makes rich without trouble, and imparts treasure which neither moth nor rust corrupts, nor can thieves steal, is so near us! The one pearl of great price Tyre did not make an article of traffic. What advantages it to gain the whole world if the soul suffers damage. Oh, how many gifts of God are in the service of sin? Great merchant-cities, great cities of sin. How often, and how many ways are men's souls the objects of buying and selling (ver. 13). With things perfectly beautiful man was certainly to occupy himself. But where are they to be found in the earthly sphere? (Col. iii. 2). That Tyre was so full and honoured, while Zion became always poorer and poorer, and sunk miserable—this formed a stumbling-block to the people of God, But what has become of all the fulness and glory of Tyre? Zion, on the other hand, has gloriously blossomed anew.

(Vers. 26–36).

The glory of the earth shall become dust and ashes. The higher we reach, so much the more precipitous, and so much the deeper will be the fall. The element of our security can so easily become the element of our misery: here the sea, elsewhere gold, one's position, &c. A person of high estate when cast

down is lower than one who has always been in a humble position. The wind does not always fill our sails; it often also, and suddenly, tears them short and small. In prosperity men so rarely consider how vain it is, that in adversity they cry out the more loudly; but, alas! only upon the vanity of earthly things, and not upon the vanity of their earthly hearts. Remember that thou art dust, and bethink thyself that thou hast a soul. Fear is salutary, but there is also a fear which we again shake off, and which we do not suffer to warn us. The loss of earthly things gives such trouble and for the loss of heavenly things men will laugh! A Christian should not so mourn, but should smite his breast alike in prosperity and in adversity. Michael and Tyre (ver. 32). Who is as thou? This it is proper to say only of God in reference to glory. In respect to nothingness, on the other hand, one of us is as another. Mournful times should be times of repentance.—The holy sense of the *nil mirari*. From ver. 34 we learn, the end of earthly things, their scale value, and true estimation. All this world is nothing; how surely must there be what is something! But faith cries out of the depths to God. Contrast the glory of the children of God with the world's glory.—*(Lange).*

PROPHETICAL DIRGE ON THE KING OF TYRE, AS THE EMBODIMENT OF THE SPIRIT OF CARNAL PRIDE AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF THE WHOLE STATE. THE FALL OF ZIDON, THE MOTHER-CITY. THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL IN CONTRAST WITH TYRE AND ZIDON (Chap. xxviii.).

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—"In this chapter we have a sublime threnody on the prince of Tyre, couched in language of the keenest irony. His fall is first of all traced to his insufferable pride, which is described in the most glowing terms (vers. 2–6). His merited punishment is next announced (7–10). The prophet, in obedience to the divine command, then proceeds to deliver the funeral dirge, exaggerating the dignity and magnificence of the fallen monarch, with which he contrasts his utter degradation (11–19). Then follows a prediction announcing the fall of the mother-city, Zidon (20–23). And the chapter concludes with promises of deliverance to the Jews, and their restoration to prosperity in their own land."—*Henderson.*

Ver. 2. "The prince of Tyrus." The monarch of Tyre, at the time of Ezekiel's prophecy, was Ithbaal II. The latter part of this compound name implies his close connection with Baal, the Phœnician supreme God, whose representative he was. "I am a God, I sit in the seat of God." "The seat of God is a seat which, in its absolute inaccessibleness, is like the seat of God in heaven. He sets or makes his mind like the mind of God; he has so pushed himself into the height that in his folly he arrogates to himself what God claims to Himself by right. It belongs to the nature of God, to be and to have all from Himself; to the nature of man, to derive all from the fulness of God. If man imagines himself to subsist as God in himself, this is the greatest of all perversities, which cannot remain unpunished, because God does not give His glory to another. The fundamental passage is Isa. xiv. 14, where the king of Babylon compares himself with the Most High. The general divine name, Elohim, the Godhead, stands as usual, where there is a contrast of man and God, of earth and heaven."—*(Hengstenberg.)*

Ver. 3. "Wiser than Daniel." Daniel had, at this time (B.C. 588), been chief of the wise men of Babylon for about fourteen years. "Daniel's wisdom must have been generally known and acknowledged, especially

among the Jews in the Chaldean exile; for Ezekiel presupposes that the King of Tyre knew of Daniel, and certainly as one whom no other but himself excelled in wisdom; so that Daniel can be no mere Jewish celebrity, but must have proved his wisdom on the theatre of the world. To Daniel is ascribed not merely wisdom, but even a special kind of it, that to which nothing hidden was dark. The King of Babylon says of Daniel in ch. iv. 6, "I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee." Daniel had appeared as one from whom no secret was hidden in the very beginning of his career, and thereby laid the foundation of his prominent position." —*(Hengstenberg.)*

Ver. 7. "**The terrible of the nations.**" The foreigners, barbarians, the terrible ones of the nations. These were the Chaldean foreigners, noted for their ferocity (Isa. i. 11, xxv. 2; Ezek. xxxi. 12).

Ver. 8. "**Thou shalt die the deaths.**" "*Deaths*, a peculiar form in the plural, to indicate emphatically the most violent death. The death of the king of Tyre is compared to that of those slain in a sea-engagement, and cast into the deep."—*(Henderson).* "The plural here and Jer. xvi. 4. is a *pluralis exaggerativus*, a death so painful as to be equivalent to dying many times."—*(Keil).*

Ver. 12. "**Thou sealest up the sum.**" The literal rendering is, "Thou art the one sealing the sun of perfection." Seals were used for the purpose of authenticating or securing anything. When it is said, therefore, that the King was the seal of perfection, the meaning is, that he could not be surpassed in riches, splendour, or power. The sum-total of all that was illustrious concentrated in him. He vindicated to himself all that mortal could pretend to."—*(Henderson).*

Ver. 13. "**Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God.**" "The prophet places the monarch in the primitive abode of man, with which was associated every idea of pleasure and delight. It is quite a lowering of the subject to suggest with Michaelis that he might have had a summer residence in the beautiful valley of the cedars of Lebanon, whither he retired during the hot season of the year. Eden was called the garden of God because it was of His plantation, and formed the delightful scene of His Divine manifestations to the first pair. To have been there conveys the idea of the most distinguished honour and felicity. Taking occasion from his reference to Eden, with which the Bible history connects the existence of bdellium and onyx-stones, Ezekiel, with his usual minuteness, gives a detailed account of the precious gems which adorned the regal state. The nine precious stones here specified correspond to those with the same names in the description of the high priest's breastplate (Ex. xxxix. 10–13)." —*Henderson.*

Ver. 14. "**The anointed cherub that covereth.**" Ezekiel, as a priest, employs imagery drawn from the Jewish temple. Like the cherubim overshadowing the mercy seat, the King of Tyre—a demi-god in his own esteem—spread his protecting wings over his dominions. "**The holy mountain of God.**" "To this his illimitable ambition aspired. In imagination he occupied Mount Zion, the dwelling place of the Most High." —*(Henderson).* "**Thou hast walked up and down.**" As priest (1 Sam. ii. 30, 35).

Ver. 15. "**Thou wast perfect in thy ways . . . till iniquity was found in thee.**" "The rectitude with which the monarch commenced his reign may be illustrated by a reference to the history of Hiram (1 Kings v. 7); but having in process of time become corrupt through the uninterrupted commercial prosperity of the Tyrian state, he indulged in unscrupulous acts of injustice and cruelty, on

account of which merited punishment is here denounced."—*(Henderson).*

Ver. 18. "Thy sanctuaries." The king is said to possess sanctuaries in regard to the ideal position ascribed to him (ver. 14). "Any greatness consecrated by God, any glory imparted by Him, may be regarded as a sanctuary, the desecration of which by the foeffee is followed by desecration by the feudal lord. The idea of the sanctuary is that of separation from the world, which exerts all its destructive powers in vain against the gift imparted by God, so long as the possessor remains in the right position towards God."—*(Hengstenberg.)* "From the midst of thee." The king is here regarded as comprehending in himself the city and the people.

Ver. 20. "Against Zidon." "Zidon was a very ancient Phœnician city, otherwise famous for its fishery, (hence its name from *Zud* 'to fish'), and afterwards for its extended and flourishing commerce both by sea and land. It became so noted for the manufacture of glass and other articles of luxury, that the epithet *Sidonia ars* was used by the ancients to denote whatever was elegant or magnificent. According to Strabo, the Zidonians were celebrated for their skill in astronomy, philosophy, navigation, and all the liberal arts. Zidon was founded by the first-born of Canaan (Gen. x. 15); and was situated, according to Strabo, two hundred stadia to the north of Tyre. Favoured by its position on the coast of the Mediterranean, it early became celebrated for its commerce. In the time of Jacob, it is mentioned in connexion with shipping (Gen. xlix. 13); and in that of Joshua, it is celebrated as a 'Great' city (Josh. xi. 8; xix. 28). It lay within the boundary of the land assigned to the tribe of Asher; but was never conquered by the Israelites (Judg. i. 31). At the present day, the town of Saida, a little to the west; occupies its site. It has a fine old ruined tower projecting far into the sea, with a bridge of many arches that was built to reach it. In Matt. xi. 22, Tyre and Zidon are coupled together." *(Henderson).*

Ver. 24. "A pricking." The word occurs elsewhere only in Lev. xiii. 51, 52; xiv. 44, and is used of the "*fretting* leprosy." The Sidonian briar had wounded Israel.

Ver. 25. "And shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen." "These cities, which had been a constant source of annoyance to their neighbours, and to none more than to the Jews, being rendered powerless, the people of God, restored from Babylon to their own land, should enjoy all their ancient privileges, and all around them be compelled to ascribe to Jehovah, as their covenant God, the glory due to His name."—*(Henderson.)*

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1-19.

The King of Tyre.

Consider the prophet's description of this King.

I. As the incarnation of earthly pride and self-sufficiency. The pride and vain glory of the nation, the history of its prosperity and of the corruptions that led to its fall, are, by the imagination of the prophet, supposed to be embodied in an ideal Prince of Tyre. This prince is regarded as the incarnation of the carnal pride, self-sufficiency, and wickedness of the whole state. He is the sum-total of the wickedness of the entire nation, but his chief offence is pride; or

rather pride is the spring and fountain of all his iniquities. His pride manifested itself in two forms:—1. *In assuming to be God.* "Thou hast said, I am God, I sit in the seat of God" (ver. 2). Beyond this, it is not possible for human arrogance to go. Not content with adopting the title of God, he must needs seize upon the functions of the Divine government. Many will not state this pretence in words, but they act as if neither God nor man had a right to say anything to them. Not to acknowledge God's rights over us is to throw off His authority, and to become a God unto ourselves. In such a spirit as this to sit in judgment on His dealings, as if we could correct Him, is to commit a daring iniquity. It is "to snatch from His hand the balance and the rod." His pride also showed itself:—2. *In the conceit of wisdom.* (ver. 3). As he thought that he possessed all wisdom in himself, so he would pray for none. In his own imagination he was wiser than Daniel, who was the wisest man of whose fame he had heard. The Chaldeans confessed Daniel's wisdom (Dan. ii. 10, 11). He had done what they admitted was beyond human power. He stood upon the highest stage of wisdom attainable by man. For this prince to declare himself wiser than Daniel was to transcend the stage of humanity, and to make himself equal with God. And further, Daniel had predicted the coming of God's universal kingdom (Dan. ii. 44). This prince proudly thought that he could convict Daniel of error, seeing he had established himself as the God of this world. The prophet ascribes to Daniel a special kind of wisdom,—that to which nothing was dark or hidden (Dan. iv. 9). "There is no secret that they can hide from thee," says the prophet when interpreting the thoughts of this proud prince (ver. 3). The prince of Tyre also boasted of his wisdom to get riches,—of that practical wisdom which can show material results that dazzle and impress the minds of men (vers. 5, 6). And Daniel also was remarkable for this kind of wisdom. He was a great public man, and not merely a solitary thinker. He was the statesman among the prophets. But we are not to regard the prophet as merely making a comparison between one wise man and another, as this world counts wisdom. Daniel ascribed all *his* wisdom to God above. Therefore the wisdom of these two men could not be compared by the same scale (Dan. ii. 20, 28, 29, 30, 45).

II. His punishment. 1. *Great humiliation.* The Chaldean foreigners, noted for their great ferocity, would descend upon the nation (ver. 7). All the beautiful possessions acquired by this prince's boasted wisdom would be spoiled. The oblivion and dishonour of the grave would be the fittest natural image of his humiliation. "They shall bring thee down to the pit" (ver. 8). He would die many "deaths," for as the king he would die in each of his slain subjects. 2. *His great pretentions would not save him from destruction.* "Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God?" (ver. 9). The hope that he cherished in the day of his prosperity will fail him before the enemy. Then will it be manifest that he is man and not God. In the day of adversity he shall have to learn another language. 3. *He shall have punishment in kind.* He defiled the nation by his pride, and now he is desecrated in turn. His "brightness" was to be "defiled," his person to be profaned (ver. 9). ["The second "slayeth" in this verse should be rendered "profaneth."] 4 *His punishment demands a sad lamentation.* Consider what he once was. He was highly endowed (ver 12). He enjoyed as it were, a glory like unto the first man in Paradise (ver. 13). He once had the beauty of youth, and was in a state of comparative innocence (ver. 15). Nations degenerate towards their old age. Now he had gone the way of old-world nations, who were all wrecked by pride (ver. 17). It was sad to think of all his labours and pains coming to nought. All that exalts itself against God is nothing, and will come to nothing. He only that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Consider this Prince of Tyre :—

III. As a prelude of Antichrist. Antichrist is one who being only man claims to be God. The King of Tyre was a type of this man of sin (2 Thes. ii. 3, 4). In our own age there are various forms of this spirit of Antichrist. 1. *The spirit of lawlessness.* St. Paul speaks of this in 2 Thess. 7, 8, where "the mystery of iniquity" is literally "the mystery of lawlessness," and "that Wicked," that lawless one. The growing spirit of disregard to all authority, human and divine, is an instance of this apostacy. It is a state of things in which every man is a law unto himself. 2. "*The religion of humanity.*" This age in its pride of knowledge has produced some bold enough to make the blasphemous assertion that there is no God save humanity. And Unitarianism also has a natural tendency to drift into the same form of blasphemy. It shrinks from saying "Christ is God," yet cannot rest in this denial, but boldly says "Man is God." 3. *Popery.* When men lost their faith in Christ as the real, though invisible Head of His Church; when the God-man, because he could be no longer seen or touched or handled, appeared to be far off, they yearned for a substitute. They lent questionable honours and ambiguous titles to a Pope. They invested with the powers of Christ the man who had placed himself in the seat of Christ. All such blasphemies as these spring from one bitter root in human nature—the tendency in man to yield to the tyranny of the visible. The truth is forgotten, that "the Head of every man is Christ." Wherever by the speculations or actions of men Christ is dethroned, there will not fail many to arise to claim the vacant seat.

(Verses 20–23.)

The Prophecy against Zidon.

1. *God's aim in His judgments.* It is to make Himself known what a dreadful, just, and holy God He is, and that He may be declared by men to be so. God would destroy Zidon by pestilence and war, that He might be glorified and sanctified in her. She would not give glory to God before; the Lord would therefore fetch His glory out of her by His judgments, and make others see the same, so that they might confess Him to be a God of power, justice, and holiness. (Ps. ix. 16.) 2. *It is the Lord that sends judgments upon cities and persons.* "I will send into her pestilence, and blood into her streets." It is the Lord gives commissions as to the prophets to prophecy judgments against a city, so to the judgments themselves, to come to and upon them. Let none stumble by looking at the instruments, they are the sword in God's hand, He causes it to wound and to kill.—*(Greenhill.)*

(Ver. 24).

I. Some general observations from hence, that wicked men are thorns. 1. *Their acquaintance is not desirable.* Familiarity with them is dangerous (Prov. xxiv. 1). They may be honourable or eminent, yet we should neither envy them nor affect their company: and why? "For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief." They are the "seed of the serpent," and cannot cordially close with the "seed of the woman." There is

enmity between their seeds. "The best of them is as a briar; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge." 2. *Answerable fruit is to be expected from them.* Thorns and briers must bring forth fruit suitable for their natures. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. Wickedness proceeds from the wicked, it is natural to them to do wickedly, and nothing else: fire comes out of brambles, and devours the cedars of Lebanon (Jud. ix. 15). *The Lord's servants should see to it, that briers and brambles overrun not all the field and vineyard of God.* They do grow high, great, spread, and are like to endanger much if they be not dealt with. There are thorns and briers in all places; there are state brambles, city thorns, and church briers: such were in the church of Galatia, which Paul wisheth were cut off (Gal. v. 12), because they scratched and troubled them: and David's resolution was, to thrust away as thorns all the sons of Belial who troubled the state and city of Jerusalem (2 Sam. xxiii. 6). And in Psa. ci. 8, he saith, "I will early destroy all the wicked of the Land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord." Here was a man after God's own heart, that would not suffer pricking thorns and grieving briers.

II. **Some more general observations from the words of the verse.** 1. *The church and people of God live amongst thorns.* The church is a lily among thorns (Cant. ii. 2). Jerusalem was amidst heathenish nations. Christ and His apostles were among scribes and Pharisees, whose spirits were thorny. Hence we ought to infer—(1.) *That God's people ought to take heed how they walk.* Men who live and walk among briers and thorns had need have their eyes in their heads; they may otherwise be entangled in the briers and miserably scratched. (2.) *Then it is not strange if God's people be scratched sometimes by wicked men* They will tear and rend their names, states, comforts, peace, privileges. (3.) *Then see a reason why God's people cannot carry on His work with more speed.* When thorns are in the way, things move slowly. When good seed was sown, the thorns hindered the growth of it. When Joshua went about taking Ai, there was Achan, a great thorn, in the way; when Nehemiah was in the work of the Temple, Tobias and Sanballat were thorns in the way. 2. *The church and people of God shall not always be among briers and thorns.* They shall have a time of freedom. "There shall be no more a pricking brier and a piercing thorn." This was made good to the Jews in the letter after their return. The nations which had been thorns to them the Lord destroyed. This promise refers also to the Gospel times; the Lord is making way for it now. This should draw out our spirits in prayer unto the Lord to hasten the time, and that He would make good what he hath promised (Isa. lv. 13). 3. *Wicked men have ill thoughts of God's people.* They slight them. The briers and thorns round about the house of Israel despised them and scorned them (Ps. lxxix. 4).—*Greenhill.*

(Ver. 25).

The Jews were scattered into the Eastern countries, over several provinces of the King of Babylon, and here the Lord promiseth to gather them out thereof, and to return them to their own land. 1. *God's people have no fixed, certain habitation in this world, but are subject to scatterings.* The Church was "scattered throughout all the regions of Judea and Samaria" (Acts viii. 1; Heb. xi. 37). 2. *God hath a care of His scattered people.* He will sanctify His name in bringing them into a safe and happy condition. They shall be brought into Canaan, that is into the Church, which Canaan represents. As the Jews were gathered out of Babylon, and the provinces thereof, into their own land,

so shall all the elect be brought into the Church of God, where is peace, safety, and confidence, where they shall find God a habitation, a vineyard. (Isa. xi. 10). The Lord Christ was a great gatherer (Luke xi. 23; xiv. 16, 17, 21, 23). 3. *God's end in gathering His people.* That they may sanctify Him, and that He may be sanctified by them. God's power, faithfulnes, and goodness, appear in His gathering them and bringing them out of their enemies' hands; and so way is made for His praise and honour, and that before their enemies.—*(Greenhill).*

(Vers. 24–26.)

God's judgments on the ungodly tend to the good of His Church. God sets His own free at length. The promise has been fully made good through Christ, as Zacharias says, that we are "redeemed from the hand of our enemies to serve Him without fear." (Luke i. 74.) Then do believers first come to their true and perfect rest, when all their bodily and spiritual enemies have been rooted out. This prophecy is fulfilled in the Christian Church, which is the true seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those born under the Old Covenant were in bondage, while believers under the New Testament are free. —*(Lange.)*

THE FIRST OF FOUR CHAPTERS DIRECTED AGAINST EGYPT (Chap. xxix.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — "Pharaoh, a monarch with whom the Hebrews were frequently in contact, is represented as vaunting in the security of his position, when the prophet is commissioned to announce the Divine interposition to effect the desolation of his country throughout its whole extent (vers. 1-12). Though after the lapse of forty years the Egyptian people were to be restored to their country, the kingdom was never to emerge from that state of degradation to which it should be reduced (13-16). The following verses (17–20), distinctly announce the conquest of the country by Nebuchadnezzar; and the chapter concludes with a promise of future prosperity to the Jews (ver. 21)."—*(Henderson).*

Ver. 3. "Pharaoh . . . . the great dragon." "*Pharaoh* was a general name of the kings of Egypt down to the time of the Persian conquest. A more appropriate emblem of these kings could not have been selected than that of the *Heb.* word *tanim*, by which we are to understand the crocodile, the terrible sea-monster inhabiting the Nile, whose usual size is about eighteen or twenty feet in length, but sometimes from thirty to forty. This animal occurs on Roman coins as emblematical of Egypt. The 'rivers' were the branches into which the Nile was divided, and to which the country was indebted for its fertility."—*(Henderson.)*

Ver. 4. "I will put hooks in thy jaws." According to Herodotus crocodiles were taken with hooks (Job xli. 1, 2). In the Assyrian sculptures prisoners are represented with a hook in the under lip, and a cord from it held by the king. "All the fish of thy rivers shall stick unto thy scales." "If the Nile denotes the prosperity of Egypt, the fish are its inhabitants living in prosperity, that feel themselves as fish when they are in the water, but now are placed on the dry ground. They are drawn out with the dragon; the subjects fall with the king, and in consequence of his fall."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 5. "I will have thee thrown into the wilderness." "The wilderness, in contrast with the Nile, denotes the state of weakness without help or means. The contrast is taken

from the natural conditions of Egypt, where the waste, awful wilderness borders on the fertile banks of the Nile. The 'field' is the open field, in contrast with the splendid mausoleums in which the Egyptian Pharaohs were buried in the times of their glory. He comes down so low, that he does not even receive an honourable burial. Who would trust in a deliverer, and make him an idol, who cannot provide this for himself, who is destined to feed the ravens, and will very soon be carrion! The king is, so to speak, an ideal person, who comprises in himself a great numerical multiplicity. Thus the statement is appropriate: 'Thou shalt not be brought together, nor gathered.' Each of his deceased subjects was, as it were, a part of Pharaoh, as in the retreat from Moscow Napoleon was seen in every dead Frenchman." —(*Hengstenberg.*)

Ver. 6. **"A staff of reed to the house of Israel."** There is an allusion to the reeds on the banks of the Nile, which broke if one attempted to lean upon them. (Isa. xxxvi. 6.) Israel had trusted in Egypt, in many alliances, but found to her sorrow that she had leaned upon a broken reed.

Ver. 7. **"At a stand."** This describes the contraction of the muscles by the sudden pain. "It pierced through their shoulders, and made these, by injuring their muscles, ligaments, and joints, stiff and rigid, so that they could but stand and move no more. So fared it with the kingdom of the ten tribes under Hosea in connection with Egypt, and likewise with the kingdom of Judah under Zedekiah."—*Lange.*

Ver. 10. **"From the tower of Syene."** Some translate, "From Migdol to Syene." Migdol signifies a "fortress," and was the name of a city lying to the north of Su z. Syene was situated in the remote south.

Ver. 11. **"No foot of man... neither shall it be inhabited forty years."** There would be no settled inhabitants. If this period began the year after the capture of Tyre, B. C. 572, it would end in the fifth year of Cyrus (B. C. 532) Jerome remarks, the number *forty* is one often connected with affliction and judgment. The rains of the Flood in forty days brought destruction on the world. Moses, Elias, and the Saviour fasted forty days. The interval between Egypt's overthrow by Nebuchadnezzar, and the deliverance by Cyrus, was about forty years. This prophecy is not to be understood to mean that literally no foot of man nor beast should pass through the land. The meaning rather is, that for forty years the land would be in the wilderness-state of social and political degradation (Isa. xix. 2, 11).

Ver. 14. **"Pathros."** Upper Egypt, being the oldest part of Egypt, and from whence civilization and the arts had sprung. **"A base kingdom."** It was to remain in a state of vassalage. Amasis made it dependent on Babylon, and under Cambyses it was humbled still more.

Ver. 16. **"Which bringeth their iniquity to remembrance."** The offered help of Egypt was a temptation which developed the iniquity of Israel, and made it manifest before the world. "Whosoever beguiles into iniquity, brings iniquity to remembrance, or to the knowledge of him to whom the iniquity refers. For existing iniquity cannot remain unmarked or unpunished by the 'Judge of all the earth.'"—*(Hengstenberg.)*

Ver. 17. **"In the seven and twentieth year."** There is a departure here from strict chronogical order. This is the last of Ezekiel's prophecies, and is dated two years later than the vision in Ch. xl. It would thus appear that the prophecies concerning foreign nations are grouped together in order to secure greater unity of subject.

Ver. 18. **"Every head was made bald, and ever shoulder was peeled."**

With carrying baskets of earth and stones for the siege-works. "Yet had he no wages." He failed to secure results in proportion to the time and labour which he expended on the siege of Tyre. The Tyrians had carried away the greater part of their treasures in ships, so that little was left for the invader. The siege lasted thirteen years.

Ver. 19. "It shall be the wages for his army." "Jehovah, whose work he had performed, here promises to recompense him with the conquest of Egypt. On breaking up from Tyre he proceeded to that country, which he found so distracted by internal commotions, that he easily devastated and made himself master of the whole land."—*(Henderson).*

Ver. 20. "For Me." Nebuchadnezzar was the servant of God, unconsciously carrying out the purposes of the Divine will (Jer. xxv. 9).

Ver. 21. "The opening of the mouth in the midst of them." "While Egypt was subject to eastern rule, the Jews were to be restored to their own land, and full liberty was to be given to the prophet to exercise his ministry among them. Sacred history is silent relative to the last days of Ezekiel, but there is nothing that militates against the supposition that he returned with his fellow-countrymen from Babylon" —*(Henderson.)*

HOMILETICS.

(Vers. 17—20.)

1. *Men in misery keep account exactly of their sufferings.* Ezekiel was in captivity, and many other Jews, who diligently heeded how the years passed. "In the seven and twentieth year," that was of the captivity. Men are best chronologers in adversity. 2. *When God is about to do great things, He usually makes His purpose known unto some of His servants.* When He was upon destroying Sodom, He made it known unto Abraham (Gen. xviii. 17); when about to destroy Eli's house, He revealed it to Samuel (1 Sam. iii. 11, 12); the strange things which befel the King of Babylon were revealed to Daniel (Dan. iv.); and the Lord showed John things to come (Rev. i. 1). And here He hides not His purpose from Ezekiel. This was so frequent of old, that Amos said, "Surely the Lord will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos iii. 17). 3. *Heathenish soldiers have hazarded their lives to please their heathenish commanders, and all for a temporal reward.* The King of Babylon's army served a great service thirteen years together; to lie before a city was hard, their heads were made bald, their shoulders were peeled, they laboured hard, carried heavy burdens, they watched, they suffered heat and cold, and all this for hope of good plunder in Tyre. If heathens would do and endure so much for their commander, who was an idolator, an enemy to God and His people, how much more should Christians do and endure anything for Christ, their King, and heavenly Commander. If He say Go, we should go; if Come, we should come. If He calls us to endure affliction, and suffer hard things, we should not stick at them, no, though it be the jeoparding of our lives, knowing He hath a spiritual and eternal reward for us. 4. *Armies may serve long and suffer hard things, and after all be disappointed of their expectations.* The King of Babylon and his army had no "wages." They expected great matters in Tyrus, which was so rich, and full of all sorts of commodities, but found nothing considerable, nothing answering their expectation, or sufficient to recompense their charge and suffering. 5. *Nations, lands, kingdoms, are the Lord's, and He disposes of*

them to whom He pleases. "I will give the land of Egypt," etc. (ver. 19). He would take it from Pharaoh and give it to another. Neither did the Lord do any wrong unto Pharaoh, because he was tenant at will, and held upon these terms to be king while he carried himself well; but he grew proud, insolent, and like a dragon lay in the midst of his rivers, saying, "My river is mine, and I have made it for myself." God therefore took his kingdom from him. 6. *God, in His holy and wise providence, makes use of any instruments to do His work.* The King of Babylon and his army were working for God. They were His servants, though they knew it not. God can make use of the worst of men as well as of the best. He can promote his interests by an army of heathens, as well as by an army of Christians. It is good, therefore, not to stick upon the instruments which work; but to consider in whose hands they are, and who regulates them. 7. *The Lord suffers not any to labour for Him in vain.* Not even heathens and infidels. He gave the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar and his army, who were the worst of the heathen (Ez. vii. 24), because they served and wrought for Him. When the midwives would not destroy the male children of the Jews, but save them alive, because they feared God, He dealt with them and gave them houses (Ex. i. 17—21). Jehu was wicked, yet because he did the work of the Lord in rooting out Ahab's family, in destroying Baal with all his priests and temple, therefore the Lord largely rewarded him (2 Kings, x. 30). If heathens shall not labour for God in vain, much less shall Christians, who know how to act from a right principle, in a right manner, and for a right end. If they meet with hardship in His service, He will remember and reward it fully, not with a temporal kingdom, but with an eternal. The Kingdom of Heaven shall be given to them (Luke xii. 32). A cup of cold water, two mites cast into the treasury, a sigh, a tear, laid out for God and His interest shall not be forgotten. He deals bountifully with His servants (Psa. cvi. 7.—*(Greenhill.)*

(Ver. 21).

"I will give thee the opening of the mouth in the midst of them." Ezekiel had been silent and dumb twice before (Ez. iii. 24; xxiv. 27). And here, God would give Him the opening of the mouth; by which we are to understand.—1. *Freedom of speech.* Thou speakest things darkly now, with a trembling voice, but when these prophecies are fulfilled, and the horn of the house of Israel begins to bud, then shalt thou have more freedom of speech, and be troubled no more with the false prophets, which sought to disparage thee. 2. *Matter of speaking.* When Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin, should have his prison garments changed, and be set above other princes, some freedom granted to the Jews; here would be matter for praise and rejoicing. 3. *Opportunity for speaking.* When an occasion is given unto man to speak, the rabbins call that the opening of the mouth. Thou shalt come openly into the assemblies, having matter, freedom, and opportunity to praise Me. "They shall know that I am the Lord." "They" refers not only to the house of Israel, but to the Babylonians also; when they should see the things prophesied come to pass, then they should acknowledge the Lord. The horn of Israel budded in the midst of the Babylonians, and the prophet's mouth was opened in the midst of them. Therefore they should know the Lord as well as the Jews. (1.) *How low, weak, afflicted soever the Church be, God is able to raise it up and to bring it to a flourishing condition.* The house of Israel was low, the horn of it weak and hardly visible; yet God caused the horn thereof bud. When we look upon some beasts, they have no horns; but in a short time their heads do bud and bring forth horns, which are their strength; so God in a little time would cause

Israel to put forth strength and be once more prosperous. (2.) *However much the Church suffers from the calumny of others, God can raise up efficient advocates from the midst of His own people.* Israel shall not be for ever crushed by the heel of the oppressor, or lashed by the tongue of the slanderer. She shall have power to plead her own cause. The sense of former injustice from her enemies and the knowledge that God is helping her will fill her mouth with eloquence. God opens the mouths of His servants that they may comfort His people, give praise to His name, and make Him known to the nations.

The Doom of Egypt. (Chap. xxx.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — This chapter contains two distinct messages: vers. 1–19 being an extension, with more life-like detail, of the prophecy announced in chap. xxix. 1–16 relating to Egypt; the second message, vers. 20–26, referring directly to Pharaoh and the downfall of his dynasty.

Ver. 1. "**Woe worth the day!**" Alas for the day!

Ver. 2. "**The time of the heathen.**" Wherein they shall be punished. The judgment on Egypt is the beginning of a world-wide judgment on all the heathen enemies of God (Joel i. 15; ii. 1, 2; iii.; Obad. 15).

Ver. 4. "**Her foundations shall be broken down.**" Referring to the state under the figure of a house destroyed from the foundation — government, laws, strongholds, and all the defences of the commonwealth.

Ver. 5. "**Ethiopia, Libya, and Lydia.**" Cush, Phut, and Lud, allies of the Egyptians mentioned Jer. xlvi. 9. "**The mingled people.**" Hired soldiers of various nationalities. "**Chub.**" This is the only place in the Old Testament where this people is named. Supposed to be the *Kufa* mentioned on the monuments—a nation north of Palestine. "**Men of the land in league.**" Not only the Jews — the people of the covenant—resident in Egypt, but all the confederates who entered into a league with the Egyptian king.

Ver. 9. "**Messengers go forth from Me in ships to make the careless Ethiopians afraid.**" The cataracts on the Nile interposing between them and Egypt shall be no barrier. Ill news travels fast when the feet of the messengers are quickened with the fear of Divinely outpoured vengeance.

Ver. 13. "**I will destroy the idols of Noph.**" Memphis, the capital of Middle Egypt and the chief seat of idol-worship. "**Pathros**"—Upper Egypt, with **No**, or Thebes, its capital, famed for its magnificent buildings, of which colossal ruins still remain, in antithesis to **Zoan**, or Tanis, a chief city in Lower Egypt within the Delta.

Ver. 15. "**Sin, the strength of Egypt.**" Pelusium, the frontier fortress on the north-east, called by *Hirtius* the Lock of Egypt, and by *Suidas* the Key of Egypt.

Ver. 17. "**Aven**"—meaning *vanity* or *iniquity*. The famous Heliopolis, or City of the Sun—the religious centre, the spiritual capital. "**Phi-beseth**"—Bubastis in Lower Egypt, near the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, a chief place of idolatry, and notorious for the Cat-worship established there.

Ver. 18. "**Tehaphnehes.**" The same as Daphne, near Pelusium, a royal residence of the Pharaohs (Jer. xliii. 7, 9). Called Hanes (Isa. xxx. 4). It was said that with its capture the pride or glory of Egypt's strength would cease. "**The yokes of Egypt.**" The

sceptres — the tyrannical supremacy exercised over other nations. Nebuchadnezzar broke the sceptre of Egypt when he confirmed the kingdom to Amasis, who rebelled against Apries (Pharaoh-Hophra).

Ver. 21. "I have broken the arm of Pharaoh." Alluding to the defeat of Pharaoh-Hophra at Carchemish. By this battle the fate of Egypt was decided for ever. It never rallied from the defeat there sustained: it was the beginning of the end. The practical design of the prophecy was to extinguish all hope of any aid from Egypt, and to direct the expectation of the exiles to God alone for succour.

Ver. 22. "And will break his arms, the strong, and that which was broken." The military and governmental power of Pharaoh shall be shattered. The one arm of Egypt already broken was all the region from the Nile to the Euphrates which Nebuchadnezzar had already taken from him (2 Kings xxiv. 7); the arm still strong, but soon to be broken, was Egypt proper, over which he still held a resemblance of authority.

Ver. 25. "I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon." The Lord seizes the arms of the king of Babylon, and they are thereby kept strong, as it is said of Joseph in Gen. xlix. 24, "Strong are the arms of his hands by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob," while the arms of the king of Egypt, left to himself, hang down powerless.

Ver. 26. "I will scatter the Egyptians." Several fled with Apries to Upper Egypt, and when Nebuchadnezzar wasted the country he carried many of them to Babylon. As Israel and Judah had been scattered among the nations, owing to the corrupting influence of Egypt, which brought God's wrath upon the elect nation, so the Egyptians themselves, in righteous retribution, were to be scattered among the nations.

HOMILETICS.

The Overthrow of a Great Nation.

(Vers. 1–19.)

There is a fine piece of military music that represents the movements of a battalion in the distance; faintly but unmistakably the strains fall upon the ear, growing more distinct and loud in the steady advance, until, having reached the scene of action and begun operations, the music breaks into a crash of wild, stirring melody, that strangely mingles with the noise and confusion of the dreadful conflict. Similar to this is the voice of the prophet which, in the preceding chapter faintly indicates the approach of calamity, rises in the present chapter into shrill, piercing tones of agony, as if already in the midst of the destruction he prophesies. In this paragraph we learn that the *overthrow of a great nation*—

1. **Is the occasion of widespread suffering and sorrow** (vers. 1–4). Egypt, which had grown into the magnificence of a first-rate power and become renowned in commerce, art, literature, and science, was doomed to fall. It was to experience the crushing vengeance of the Divine power it had so often resisted and defied, and to suffer for its cruel treatment of the people of Jehovah, whom it had so often deceived and oppressed. Great was the consternation of its proud rulers, and loud and heartrending the wails of its stricken people, as the sword of the destroyer passed through the land. It was indeed "a cloudy day;" the dreariness of havoc and desolation was intensified by the darkness

of despair that filled the minds of the routed sufferers. It was worse than that night of horror in the past history of Egypt when the first-born were slain and when "there was not a house where there was not one dead." It is a painful humiliation to a great people to see how suddenly their power is crushed, government disorganised, institutions scattered, buildings, the slow growth of generations, prone in ruins, and the unsuspecting citizens one day lulled into a false security, the next paralysed with fear. The refinement and luxury to which they were accustomed render their privations and distresses the more acute.

II. **Involves the ruin of its allies and abettors** (vers. 5–9.) "Ethiopia, Libya, Lydia, all the mingled people, and Chub," represented smaller nationalities who had been either conquered by Egypt, or who, while retaining their nationality and a certain degree of autonomy, linked their fortunes with Egypt and contributed to her advancement and aggrandisement. In return for their support they claimed the protection of the overshadowing power. But when Egypt fell, they fell. When the volcano shatters the mountain, all the little knolls and rocks that cling to it are buried in the general ruin. When the hurricane uproots the giant tree, the parasites that fed and lived upon it are hurled to the dust. The adulators who fan the national pride with their fulsome flattery, and the shameless debauchees who employ their vilest ingenuities in augmenting the national wickedness, will be inevitably involved in the righteous judgment which is sure to come.

III. **Is accomplished by an agent specially equipped for the work** (vers. 10–12). The power that was to crush Egypt was already hovering over the fated nation. The vast populations of the Nile were to be opposed by a multitude of strangers whose warlike exploits had made them "the terrible of the nations;" the military genius of Pharaoh-Hophra was to come into conflict with Nebuchadnezzar, a still more able and victorious warrior. It was not the first time the great Babylonish monarch had come in contact with the arms of Egypt. Before his accession, while Crown Prince, he had fought the great battle of Carchemish, which expelled Pharaoh-Necho from Western Asia. During the siege of Jerusalem he had been disturbed by the attempt of Pharaoh-Necho to relieve that city, and during the siege of Troy, Egypt again interfered to help the Phœnicians. Nebuchadnezzar chafed under these annoyances; the proud prestige and pretensions of Egypt roused his envy and wrath, and he vowed to be revenged. All the time Jehovah was preparing him to be the agent to punish Egypt, and a rebellion against Pharaoh-Hophra by Amasis, one of his officers, presented a favourable opportunity. Gathering his army of veterans, inured to warfare and flushed with recent victories, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt and utterly subdued it from Migdol to Syene, the extreme frontiers of the kingdom, creating a horrible devastation, from which it did not recover for forty years. The Babylonish king knew not that he was simply the instrument of Jehovah in inflicting well-merited punishment, and thus fulfilling the words of the Divinely-inspired prophet. Whenever a nation reaches the crisis of its infamy, Divine justice fails not to provide the means of adequate retribution.

IV. **May be traced to the enervating influence of its idolatry** (vers. 13–18). The prime offence of Egypt was its idolatry. This was the ground of its indictment before High Heaven. Not only had it debased its own people, but it had invaded the land of the chosen people and destroyed their loyalty to Jehovah by the introduction of idolatrous rites. Idolatry is not only a foe to virtue, but a supreme insult to the One only true God, whose nature cannot

tolerate a rival. Where idolatry predominates the formation of a robust moral character is impossible; it is the canker at the root of national life, and can only end in disintegration and decay. It is significant that the places mentioned in these verses—Noph, Pathros, Zoan, No, Sin, Tehaphnehes—the cities where idolatry was most gross and rampant, are especially singled out for punishment. No nation can maintain itself in the front rank where God is persistently ignored.

V. Is the expression of the Divine judgment on its iniquities. "Thus will I execute judgments, and they shall know that I am the Lord" (ver. 19). The history of the downfall of great nations is the voice of God speaking to the nations of to-day, and saying that sin shall not go unpunished. "The time of the heathen" (ver. 3) plainly indicates that a period comes in the history of sinful nations when the forbearance of God is withdrawn and wrong-doing is allowed to reap its legitimate harvest. Hardened indeed is the heart that is insensible to the enormity of sin until it is smitten with the thunderbolt of Divine wrath. It is wise, before it be too late, to turn in penitence to Him who "retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy"

LESSONS.—1. *National greatness is an opportunity for maintaining the right.* 2. *The greatest nation, if unfaithful to God, is doomed to fall.* 3. *The destiny of all nations is in the hands of God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 2. "Woe worth the day!" **A Pathetic Lament,** as uttered—1. By one who foresees the nearness and awfulness of the calamity. 2. By the patriot distressed for the humiliation and ruin of his country. 3. By the sufferers themselves in the wild tumult of their agony. 4. By neighbouring nations left defenceless by the fall of their powerful patron. 5. By those who have obstinately neglected the day of salvation.

Ver. 3. "The day is near." "In some two years you shall be miserably routed in the deserts of Libya; immediately after, the civil war for eleven years together shall waste you, and then Nebuchadnezzar's forces will be upon you. So that, whereas there may be sixteen or eighteen years between the prophecy and its fulfilling, here are thirteen or fourteen of them taken up with sorrows and afflictions, forerunners of the rest."—*Matthew Pool.*

—"The time of the heathen." **Vengeance on idolatry.** 1. Is mercifully delayed to give space for repentance and reform. 2. Will be inflicted with unerring certainty. 3. Will fill the victims with terror and dismay—"a cloudy day—the day shall be darkened" (vers. 3, 18). 4. Will be complete and universal (compare Ps. lxxix with exegetical note on this verse).

Vers. 4–18. **The Horrors of War.** I. *Revolting scenes of human carnage.* "The sword shall take away her multitude" (ver. 4); "All helpers destroyed" (ver. 8); "Fill the land with the slain" (ver. 11). II. *Unspeakable physical and mental suffering.* "Great pain—distresses daily" (vers. 4, 9, 16); "To make the careless afraid—I will put fear in the land" (vers. 9, 13). III. *Reckless waste and destruction.* "Countries desolate—cities wasted" (ver. 7); "A fire in Egypt—all helpers destroyed" (vers. 8, 14, 16); "I will make rivers dry and the land waste" (ver. 12). IV. *Loss and degradation of youthful life.* "The young men fall by the sword—daughters go into captivity" (vers. 17, 18). V. *The overthrow of established government.* "Her foundations shall be broken down" (ver. 4); "There shall be no

more a prince of the land" (ver. 13); "I shall break the yokes (sceptres) of Egypt" (ver. 18). LESSONS.—War. 1. *Unjustifiable when it is a mere thirst for conquest.* 2. *May be a scourge to punish national sins.* 3. *Arouses the worst human passions.*

Ver. 5. **Unholy Confederacies.** 1. May seem formidable in numbers and strength. 2. Have no principle of cohesion to ensure permanency. 3. Are involved in general ruin. 4. Their fate a beacon-warning to the good.

Ver. 6. "See the justice of God: Egypt pretended to uphold Jerusalem when that was tottering, but proved a deceitful reed; and now they that pretend to uphold Egypt shall prove no better. Those that deceive others are commonly paid in their own coin; they are themselves deceived."—*M. Henry.*

Ver. 8. "As sinners perversely refuse to know God as a God of love, they shall know Him as a God that hates sin and takes vengeance on the sinner for all unatoned guilt. Severe as were the temporal judgments on Pharaoh and his people, what are they when compared with the eternal judgments which shall descend on the lost?"—*Fausset.*

Vers. 10–12. "God punishes one knave by the other, who does not escape His judgment, but is only reserved for the same; as in Jer. xxv., the king of Babylon has no other advantage over those punished by him but this, that he drinks *last.* Wickedness and judgment go hand in hand. Power can only be given to the wicked for a short time."—*Hengstenberg.*

Vers. 11, 12. "They are the *terrible* of the nations both in respect of force and of fierceness, and being terrible, shall make terrible work. They are the *wicked,* who will not be restrained by reason and conscience, the laws of nature, or the laws of nations, for they are without law. They are *strangers,* who therefore shall show no compassion for old-acquaintance' sake."—*M. Henry.*

Ver. 13. **The Delusiveness of Idolatry.** 1. Its temples and worship a standing insult to the only true God. 2. Debases its votaries. 3. Powerless to help in the day of trouble.

— "The wrath of God is especially directed against the idols of a land, of whatever kind they be, whether they be images directly worshipped as gods, or riches which steal away from God the hearts of those who would repudiate the charge of idolatry, though guilty of it before the God who calls covetousness idolatry. As the Egyptian On, the seat of the idolatrous sun-worship, was doomed by God to become Aven, or *vanity,* so all creature-confidences shall at last prove vain to those who have trusted in them rather than in God."—*Fausset.*

— "There shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt"—no native or independent prince, ruling the whole country. The dynasties of Egypt had subsisted from Menes, her first king, who is said to have reigned in the year of the world 2251, to the destruction of the Pharaohs by Nebuchadnezzar, which terminated the reign of the Egyptian princes, and showed the fulfilment of prophecy and the judgments of God upon the oppressors of His people.

Ver. 19.: comp. ver. 8, "And they shall know that I am the Lord." **God revealed in Judgment.** 1. When all other modes of revelation are persistently ignored. 2. Shows He is not indifferent to the sufferings of the oppressed. 3. Cruelty and injustice shall not go unpunished. 4. The impartial justice of the Divine procedures shall be universally acknowledged and adored.

— "The true God, whom they do not mean to worship willingly, must come to His rights in the punishment inflicted on them. This is not merely an alarming but also a comforting point of view. The most comfortless

of all thoughts is to have no part in God. How many transgressors have joyfully devoted themselves to the sword in the conviction that by the punishment they come to have a part in God!"—*Hengstenberg.*

HOMILETICS.

A Proud Monarch Humbled.

(Vers. 20–26.)

Pharaoh-Hophra, the king of Egypt referred to in this paragraph, was a man of considerable capacity and enterprise. He displayed great military genius and activity. During the first years of his reign he subdued the island of Cyprus, besieged the city of Sidon by land and sea, and took it and made himself master of Phœnicia and Palestine. Elated with success, his pride knew no bounds, and he insanely boasted that it was not in the power of the gods to dethrone him. His illusions were destined to receive a rude awakening. Libya, harassed by the Greeks, appealed to Hophra for assistance. He despatched an army for their deliverance, but the Egyptians were disastrously defeated, and very few of the soldiers returned to their native land. The sight of the straggling and wretched survivors filled the land with mourning, and indignation against Hophra was loud and threatening. It was whispered he had sent the Egyptian army into Libya to destroy it, and by surrounding himself with Greek mercenaries, for whom he showed great partiality, he was seeking to rule Egypt as a tyrant. His subjects rose in rebellion. Hophra sent Amasis, one of his officers, to quell the revolt; but the soldiers crowned him with a helmet and made him king. He accepted the honour, and made common cause with the mutineers. Exasperated with the news, Hophra sent Patarbemis, another of his great officers and one of the principal lords of his court, to arrest Amasis; and returning unsuccessful, the angry king caused the nose and ears of Patarbemis to be cut off. So barbarous an outrage, committed upon a person of such high distinction, roused the Egyptians into more violent opposition, and the insurrection became general. Hophra was compelled to retire into Upper Egypt, where he defended himself for some years, and Amasis made himself master of the rest of his dominions. The army of Nebuchadnezzar, taking advantage of these intestine troubles, swept down upon Egypt and wrecked it from end to end. Egypt was made tributary to Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar, having appointed Amasis as his viceroy, returned to his capital laden with the spoils of victory. As soon as the great king had departed Hophra emerged from his obscurity, and gathering an army of 30,000 mercenaries, made war against Amasis. The royal army was routed, Hophra taken prisoner, and shut up in his royal palace at Sais. This, however, would not satisfy the excited populace. They clamoured for the unfortunate king to be given up to them, and gaining their wish, they immediately strangled him. In this paragraph the prophet presents us with a graphic description of a *proud monarch humbled*—

I. **By the partial loss of his dominion.** "I have broken the arm of Pharaoh." (ver. 21) The loss of distant dependencies is often the precursor of national downfall: it is a sign of weakness at the centre of power. It is a loss of prestige and influence. It is a deep wound to a proud monarch deluded with the notion that he is everywhere invincible. The bitterness of his resentment blinds him to the lessons that the curtailment of his Empire should suggest.

II. **By provoking the active opposition of Jehovah.** "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against Pharaoh. But I will strengthen the arms of the

king of Babylon" (vers. 22, 25). Behind the might of Nebuchadnezzar was the invincible power of Jehovah, who had determined to punish Pharaoh for his iniquity. The strongest monarch is powerless before the vengeance of Heaven; the justice he has outraged ensures his humiliation and pain. In Retzch's illustrations of Goethe's "Faust" is one plate where angels are represented as dropping roses upon the demons who are contending for the soul of Faust. Every rose falls like molten metal, burning and blistering where it touches. So is it that justice acts upon those who have wilfully abused its claims. It bewilders where it ought to guide; it scorches where it ought to soothe and comfort. When God is against us we must be prepared for the worst.

III. **By shattering his military strength.** "And will break his arms, the strong"—the portion of the army still remaining faithful to him—"and that which was broken"—the portion already in revolt. "And the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down"—he shall be deprived of the resources for making war (vers. 22, 25). Pharaoh had boasted of his army and exulted in its brave exploits. Now he is cast down by the power in which he had trusted. Shorn of his military aggrandisement he is utterly defenceless and weak. "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. xxvi. 52). No nation is secure when the military is in the ascendant. Gibbon traces one of the potent causes for the decline of the Roman Empire to the overwhelming influence of the army.

IV. **By the total dismemberment of his kingdom.** "I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them through the countries" (vers. 23, 26). The kingdom was torn in pieces by civil war, and though Hophra made a brave and resolute stand for some years, he was compelled to yield, and he himself perished by the hands of his enraged subjects. The process of humbling a proud spirit is sometimes slow, but every successive defeat intensifies the suffering, until there is nothing left but the wild helplessness of mad despair.

V. **By making him utterly dispirited.** "He shall groan with the groanings of a deadly wounded man" (ver. 24). There is a defeat that involves no loss of dignity and may be borne with fortitude. In the Franco-German war, after the loss of Sedan, a French officer came up to the then Crown Prince and exclaimed, "Ah, sir! what a defeat! what a misfortune! I am ashamed of being a prisoner. I have lost everything." "No, indeed," was the magnanimous reply; "after you have fought like a brave soldier, you have not lost your honour." But there is a defeat that is wholly ignoble and demoralising. It has been courted by a proud self-confidence and precipitated by an unreasoning recklessness. Self-induced, it is the bitterest drop in the cup of the vanquished that the ruin in the midst of which he moans is his own rash handiwork. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" (Prov. xviii. 14).

LESSONS.—1. *Pride is the sure precursor of a fall.* 2. *Military genius and the strength of armies are impotent when opposed to Divine vengeance.* 3. *Humble trust in God gives dignity and strength to the kingly office even in disaster.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 21. **The Lessons of Suffering.** 1. Should lead us to reflect how far our suffering has been brought on by our wilful sinfulness. 2. Should induce

us to examine the principles on which our conduct has been based. 3. May lead to salutary repentance. 4. Are unnoticed by the soul blinded with pride.

— "It is in vain that men try to bind up and heal the wound that God inflicts. Stroke shall fall upon stroke in rapid succession whensoever God is against men. The very weakest instruments are sufficient, when strengthened by Him, to execute God's vengeance; and He has at His disposal all the powers that are in heaven and earth. How foolish, then, it is for any to remain in a state of enmity with God!"—*Fausset.*

Ver. 22. "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against Pharaoh." **The Opposition of Jehovah.** 1. Is terribly real and active. 2. Must convince us we are wrong, and that we must change our attitude towards Him. 3. Cannot be successfully resisted by the mightiest human combinations. 4. Can be propitiated only by humble and penitent submission.

Vers. 23, 26. **National Unity.** 1. Unreal when based only on kingly and military supremacy. 2. Must be founded in the righteousness of the individual life. 3. Is broken into fragments and scattered when God is ignored and openly defied.

Vers. 24, 25. "I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon." **The Agent of Divine Vengeance.** 1. Is prepared and strengthened for the work. 2. May be unconscious of the significance of the punishment he inflicts. 3. Can do no more than he is permitted. 4. May himself become the victim of a similar vengeance.

Ver. 24. "He shall groan with the groanings of a deadly wounded man." **The Moan of the Defeated.** 1. A familiar experience of baffled humanity. 2. Those who are most elated in the pride of prosperity are most abject and disheartened in adversity. 3. Appeals to the compassion of the sternest conqueror.

Ver. 26. "The true God, despised by Egypt from ancient times, is thereby to come by His rights regarding them. If He be the true Jehovah, the personal Being, the absolute Essence, He must necessarily be glorified, if not by their action, yet by their passion."—*Hengstenberg.*

— "They would hardly believe it, and therefore are so oft assured it" (cf. ver. 23).—*Trapp.*

— "We are here struck with the exact accomplishment of the prophecies against Egypt, against its cities and its princes, by the wars of Assyria and surrounding nations. When the measure was full the visitation came. Therefore Isaiah, Nahum, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel must have been inspired by Him to whom futurity is without a veil. What instruction, then, should the ruins of ancient cities, where powerful kings once reigned, suggest to the flourishing cities of Europe who imitate them in every species of crime and forget the Lord, who does what He pleases in the heavens above and in the earth below?"—*Sutcliffe.*

The Destruction of Assyria a Type of the Destruction of Egypt. (Chap. xxxi.)

(Vers. 1–18.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. "In the eleventh year, in the third month." Two months later than the prophecy delivered in chap. xxx. 20.

Ver. 2. "Whom art thou like in thy greatness?" The already accomplished fall of Assyria is held before the eyes of the king of Egypt as a mirror of his future. Twenty-four years before the delivery of this prophecy the Assyrian Empire was destroyed by Nebuchad-

nezzar, who twenty years later was to conquer Egypt. The practical purpose is the same as in previous prophecies, to quench any lingering hope in Judah of help from doomed Egypt.

Ver. 3. **"Behold the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon."** Ewald translates the word Asshur as meaning the highest cedar; but Hitzig shows that this is a mistake, and that the prophet speaks of Assyria. Smend and M'Farlan apply the passage to Egypt, but without sufficient grounds. The total destruction of Assyria depicted in this chapter was not true with regard to Egypt. The phrase is an answer to the question in ver. 2, "Whom art thou like in thy greatness?" Thou art like the haughty king of Assyria. The cedar in Lebanon was often eighty feet high, and the diameter of the space covered by its boughs still greater, the symmetry perfect (cf. the similar image, chap. xvii. 3; Dan. iv. 20–22). **"His top was among the thick boughs"** —"*among the clouds*" (*Hengstenberg*). "The top, or topmost shoot, represents the king; the thick boughs the large resources of the empire."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 4. **"The waters made him great"** —*the deep sent out her little rivers.* "The Tigris, with its branches and rivulets, or conduits for irrigation, was the source of Assyria's fertility. The deep is the overflowing water, never dry. Metaphorically, for Assyria's resources, as the conduits are her colonies."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 8. **"The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him"**—could not out-top him. "No other king eclipsed him. The total of the great men of the earth Ezekiel denotes as the garden of God, in which he regards them as the counterpart of the garden which God once planted in Eden—of Paradise with its glorious trees. The comparison is the more suitable because, as Paradise was planted by God, so all human greatness has its origin from God."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 10. **"Because thou hast lifted up thyself in height."** The greatness bestowed by God, being abused, is the cause of his fall.

Ver. 11. **"He shall surely deal with him"**—according to his own pleasure and according to the Assyrian's desert. "The last Assyrian king has been ascertained by the inscriptions to have been Asshur-ebid-ilut, the second in succession from Sennacherib's son Esar-haddon, who planted the settlement in Samaria from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim (2 Kings xvii. 24). The final destruction of Nineveh was by the Medo-Babylonian army under Cyaxeres and Nabopolassar. To either of these the expression 'the mighty one of the heathen' refers. The destroyer of Nineveh is called 'the mighty one' (El, a name of God), because he was God's *representative* and instrument of judgment."—*Fausset.* **"For his wickedness"**—the pride and the conduct flowing from it. "Where pride has first occupied the heart, there all divine and human rights are trampled under foot."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 12. **"All the people are gone down under his shadow."** They had formerly, like birds, perched upon the branches of the tree in its shade (ver. 5).

Ver. 13. **"Upon his ruin."** "The ruin stands for the fallen tree, as if it were a living ruin. The fowls of heaven and the beasts of the field, the wild beasts that formerly sought protection under this tree, assemble now for another object—to peck and gnaw and take what they please of its fruits."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 14. **"That none of the trees exalt themselves"**—that the nations should not proudly be elated because of their greatness and abundant resources. **"Neither their trees stand up in their height, all that drink water"** —"that no drinkers of water may stand upon their own greatness" (*Fairbairn*). **"For they are all delivered unto death"** —"those proud trees, the grandees of

the earth, who were tempted to haughtiness by their greatness, go down into the kingdom of the dead, where they are nothing else than ordinary sons of men (cf. Job. iii. 9)."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 15. **"I caused a mourning."** The deep was darkened, the babble of the streams was hushed, Lebanon was saddened, and the trees of the field were faintness itself. In the fall of Assyria the former grandees of the earth once more went through the sorrow of their own fall.

Ver. 16. **"I cast him down to hell"**—Sheol, or Hades, the unseen world. I cast him into oblivion (cf. Isa. xiv. 9–11). **"All the trees of Eden shall be comforted"**—because so great a king as the Assyrian is brought down to a level with them. **"It is a kind of consolation to the wretched to have companions in misery."**—*Fausset.*

Ver. 17. **"They that were his arm"**—his auxiliaries, the helpers or tools of his tyranny.

Ver. 18. **"Thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised."** "As circumcision was an object of mocking to thee, thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, slain by their sword."—*Grotius.* **"This is Pharaoh."** "Pharaoh's end shall be the same humiliating one as I have depicted the Assyrian's to have been. *This* is demonstrative, as if he were pointing with the finger to Pharaoh lying prostrate, a spectacle to all."—*Fausset.* **"And all his multitude."** His tumult—the noisy murmur of multitudinous life is for ever stilled.

HOMILETICS.

National Greatness no Guarantee of Permanence.

(Vers. 1–18.)

In this chapter we have an example of the dramatic genius of Ezekiel, the Æschylus of the Hebrews, and of the luxuriousness of his poetic fancy. Seizing upon the similitude of the cedar, in its stately magnificence, its many resources, its pre-eminence in stature and beauty over all other trees, and the calamity occasioned by its fall, the prophet describes the overshadowing greatness and ignominious downfall of Assyria, and with one vivid master-stroke applies the whole to the fate of Egypt. From the whole prophecy we learn—

I. **The prominent features of national greatness** (vers. 1–9.) 1. *Pre-eminence over all other nations.* "Of an high stature—exalted above all the trees of the field" (vers. 3, 5.) Assyria, though more recent in civilisation and more rapid in its growth, yet outstripped Egypt in extent of dominion and brilliance of career. Ninus, its most illustrious monarch, subdued Media, Babylonia, and several other kingdoms, and united them under one sceptre. Nineveh, its capital, built on the banks of the Tigris, was one of the most celebrated cities of antiquity. In the height of its prosperity Assyria overshadowed in greatness and power every other contemporary nation, as the cedar overtopped every other tree of the forest. 2. *Enormous resources.* "The waters made him great—his root was by great waters" (vers. 4, 5, 7). Its argosies and war-boats crowded the Tigris and Euphrates, wealth flowed into its coffers in a perpetual stream, trade and commerce assumed gigantic proportions, its mineral and agricultural products were illimitable, its public works were on a scale of unsurpassed grandeur, its arms were everywhere triumphant. 3. *The strength and protection of other nations.* "His top was among the thick boughs—all the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs—under his shadow dwelt all great

nations" (vers. 3–6.) The nations conquered by Assyria dreaded while they hated its power, and neighbouring kingdoms were proud to be its allies. They felt secure under the guardianship of its shield, and shone in the reflected splendour of its greatness and prestige. 4. *The envy of less favoured nations.* "The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him—all the trees envied him" (ver. 8, 9.) For warlike courage and prowess, for majesty of bearing, for vigour of government, for symmetry and beauty of national unity, for opulence and display, Assyria was the admiration and envy of all nationalities. It outdistanced all competitors; it stood alone in the shining brilliance of its own star-like splendour.

II. **The unmistakable symptoms of national decay** (vers. 10–17). 1. *Vaunting pride.* "Because thou hast lifted up thyself" (ver. 10). It is difficult to be at once great and humble, and yet greatness is stable only as it rests on a firm foundation of humility. "The greatest man," says Seneca, "is he who chooses right with the most invincible resolution, who resists the sorest temptations from within and without, who bears the heaviest burdens cheerfully, who is calmest in storms and most fearless under menaces and frowns, whose reliance on truth, on virtue, and on God is most unfaltering." Prosperity breeds self-confidence, self-confidence pride, pride recklessness, and recklessness ruin. The greatest peril to the individual or the nation is found at the highest point in the delirium of success. When pride overleaps sound judgment just government receives its death-blow, decay sets in, and the end is not far off. 2. *Prevailing vice.* "I have driven him out for his wickedness" (ver. 11). The ancient monarchies—Sodom, the Hittites, Canaanites, Amalekites, &c.—were ruined by their iniquities. So was it with Assyria. Amid the glitter of a refined civilisation we detect the dark destructive elements of immorality and vice. "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. xiv. 34). "The seeds of our own punishment," says Hesiod, "are sown at the same time we commit sin." 3. *Loss of allegiance and territory.* "Strangers have cut him off—upon the mountains and in the valleys his branches are fallen—the people have left him" (vers. 12, 13, 17). The break-up of a great empire may be gradual, but it is not less evident and certain. Distant dependencies are quick to discover the weakening of the power that so long overawed them, and eagerly watch for the opportunity to fling off their allegiance. The rebellion of one province is the signal for a general revolt, and the mighty empire that has filled so large a space in the history of the world crumbles into ruins. 4. *Sorrow and consternation.* "In the day he went down I caused a mourning—the nations shake at the sound of his fall" (vers. 15, 16). The struggle for freedom of revolted states and the desperate efforts of the ruling power to retain the broken remnants of authority is the occasion of wide suffering and misery. The fall of a throne that seemed impregnable fills neighbouring nations with grief and alarm. If the mighty Assyria is overthrown, what throne can be secure? The foundations of national life are upheaved, and the confidence of the most astute rulers is shaken.

III. **That national greatness is no guarantee of permanence** (vers. 2, 14, 18). This was the solemn and emphatic lesson the prophet sought to enforce. If Assyria, the magnificent, was destroyed, there was no hope that Egypt would escape a similar fate. After having ruled for more than 600 years, with great tyranny and violence, from the Caucasus and the Caspian to the Persian Gulf, and from beyond the Tigris to Asia Minor and Egypt, the Assyrian Empire vanished like a dream, and the very site of its vast capital was a doubtful question for twenty-four centuries. There have been greater nations than Assyria, but their greatness did not save them from extinction. They have

been overbalanced and crushed by the weight of their own immensity. Centuries slowly crept along, and it seemed as if they would endure for ever; but the catastrophe came, and filled the world with horrified wonder. The mightiest and proudest nation has no room to boast. The loftier its eminence the more ignominious its fall. The true greatness of a nation consists not in material prosperity, but in the virtue and uprightness of its people. Genuine religion alone can give permanence to a throne, and only so long as its genuineness is maintained.

LESSONS.—1. *The rise and fall of nations a suggestive study.* 2. *Moral greatness not always commensurate with material prosperity.* 3. *Kingly authority may be abused to a nation's ruin.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 2. "Whom art thou like in thy greatness?" **The Perils of Greatness.** 1. Apt to breed a proud, self-sufficiency. 2. May use power tyrannically. 3. Under-estimates the significance of events which threaten to undermine the foundation on which it rests. 4. May grow beyond the control of the most successful.

Vers. 3, 6. "His top was among the thick boughs — the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs—under his shadow dwelt all great nations." **The Inter-dependence of Nations.** 1. A great nation protects the lesser, and they in turn strengthen and increase their protector. 2. A strong nation is an amalgam of many nationalities. 3. Nations help each other, not by jealousies and strife, but by commerce and friendly intercourse. 4. No nation can long remain independent that does not cultivate the patriotic spirit.

Ver. 6. "How different the security afforded by the Gospel-tree! The Gospel-kingdom gathers all under its saving covert for their present and eternal good, and for the glory of God, and not for self-aggrandisement and to the hurt of men, as is the way of the kingdoms of this world. Therefore it shall never fall, nor shall those who trust in its shadow (chap. xvii. 23; Matt. xiii. 32) ever be confounded, for it is a kingdom that is established on the everlasting principles of the Divine truth, righteousness, and love."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 4, 7. "The waters made him great—his root was by great waters." **The River the natural source of Empire.** 1. Affording a bulwark of protection. 2. A necessary element of sustenance. 3. An important highway of commerce. 4. Giving fertility to the soil. 5. Favourable for the massing together of great populations.

Ver. 4. "Little rivers." "Beneficence, justice, protection, encouragements that subjects need and good princes disperse among them. So the deep filled this king, and he sent out his streams to all his subjects in his kingdom."—*Pool.*

Ver. 9. "Envy has an aspect in which it may be regarded as a good for him whom it affects. Let us only reflect on the proverb, 'Better envied than pitied.'"—*Hengstenberg.*

— "The tallest trees are weakest in the tops, and envy always aimeth at the highest."—*Trapp.*

Vers. 10–15. **Fallen Greatness.** 1 *Occasioned by the indulgence of an arrogant spirit.* "Because thou hast lifted up thyself in height" (ver. 10). 2. *The inevitable result of a life of iniquity.* "I have driven him out for his wickedness" (ver. 11). 3. *The victim of forces whose growing power was unnoticed or despised.* "I have delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen—strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off" (vers. 11, 12). 4. *Abandoned alike by allies and depen-*

dents. "All the people of the earth are gone down from his shadow, and have left him" (ver. 12). 5. *An object of insulting ridicule by those who had been benefited in better days.* "Upon his ruin shall all the fowls of the heaven remain, and all the beasts of the field shall be upon his branches" (ver. 13, compared with vers. 6, 18). 6. *A suggestive warning to the proud of all nations.* "To the end that none of all the trees exalt themselves for their height" (ver. 14, comp. ver. 16). 7. *A subject for profound and widespread grief.* "I caused a mourning—covered the deep—all the trees fainted for him" (ver. 15.)

Ver. 11. "He shall surely deal with him." "Heb., 'In doing he shall do for him—he shall do what he list with him,' as Tamerlane since did with Bajazet, whom he carried about in an iron cage, using him on festival days for a footstool, and feeding him like a dog with crumbs fallen from his table. All which Tamerlane did, not so much for hatred to the man, says the historian, as to manifest the just judgment of God against the arrogant folly of the proud."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 14. "To the end that none of all the trees." "This is the use men should make of God's heavy judgments upon others. This man's forefather, Sennacherib, had a statue set up in Egypt, says Herodotus, with this ininscription, 'Let him that looketh upon my misery learn to be modest and to fear God.'"—*Trapp.*

— "Genuine humility brings to elevation its only corrective. It fixes the eye on the lowliness which in all human greatness is present with the greatness."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 18. "Thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised." Death—1. Reduces all ranks to the same level. 2. Is indifferent to the contempt of fancied superiority. 3. Reveals the artificiality of social distinctions. 4. Its uncertainty should lead to a moral preparedness.

"Transferred to the king of Assyria, whom the cedar represented, this parabolical history tells us in the first instance of his unparalleled greatness. He was the head and centre of a vast monarchy which was fed by the tributary streams of surrounding nations, and gathered within its ample bosom the resources of the civilised world. But its peerless grandeur proved the occasion of its overthrow, for it only served to nurse into fatal maturity that pride which goeth before a fall. How thoroughly the loftiness of spirit in the head of that monarchy kept pace with the growth and magnitude of his dominion may be seen from the Heaven-daring language of Sennacherib to Hezekiah, when, before the gates of Jerusalem, his servants openly blasphemed and defied the God of Israel. Most truly was his heart lifted up in his greatness, and the hand of a righteous God must cast him down. In an amazingly brief period the mighty fabric of Assyrian glory fell, an irrevocable ruin. It was a lesson, on a gigantic scale, to the world that then was, how God in His providence abases the proud and scatters the mighty from their seats; how all power and glory that is of the world is destined to vanish away as a dream of the night. And connected as it here is with the guilt and the doom of Pharaoh, it was to him, and to those who knew the will of God concerning him, an instructive warning and example of that which certainly awaited him!"—*Fairbairn.*

"How dreadfully do the wicked scourge one another! Israel must be the first to fall; then Egypt, her ally; then Babylon, then Persia, then Greece, and lastly the iron power of Rome. These empires sank in succession, like the mighty swells of the ocean, and but faintly left their traces behind. They fell by the overflowing scourge which came suddenly upon them and involved the rich and the poor in one common ruin. But the poor who may survive have

some resources in the labour of their hands. Lay not up, then, O my soul, thy treasures in earthly banks; build not thy mansion on the sand. Blessed is the man who has the Lord for his rock and trusts alone in His salvation."—*Sutcliffe.*

Prophetic Dirges over Egypt's Fall. (Chap. xxxii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"In the twelfth year"**—in the twelfth year from the carrying away of Jehoiakin: Jerusalem was by this time overthrown, and Amasis was beginning to revolt against Pharaoh-Hophra.

Ver. 2. **"Like a young lion and as a whale"**—any monster of the waters: here the crocodile of the Nile. As a lion on dry land and a crocodile in the waters, Pharaoh is terrible alike by land and sea.

Ver. 3. **"I will spread my net"**—the Chaldeans (chap. xxix. 3, 4; Hos. vii. 12.) "Jehovah spreads His net in the congregation of many nations, and gives it over to them that they may draw it out."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 4. **"Then I will leave thee upon the land"**—it will fare no better with thee than with a fish, which must perish miserably because it is taken out of its element.

Ver. 5. **"I will fill the valleys with thy height"**—"thy hugeness" (*Fairbairn*). "The multitude of thy forces, on which thou pridest thyself, shall only be a great heap of corpses to fill the valleys up to the sides of the mountains."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 7, 8. **"I will put thee out"**—extinguish thy light in the political sky. In great political catastrophes and the endless woe connected with them, the heavenly luminaries appear to be extinguished (Isa. xiii. 10; Amos viii. 9, 10; Matt. xxiv. 29; Rev. vi. 12).

Ver. 9. **"When I shall bring thy destruction among the nations"**—"the tidings of thy destruction (*breakage*) carried by captive and dispersed Egyptians among the nations" (*Grotius*); or, "When I bring thy ruins among the nations—thy broken people, resembling one great fracture, the ruins of what they had been."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 14. **"Then will I make their waters deep"**—"to subside into the deep, to sink, or decrease" (*Fairbairn*). "To settle and grow clear. The Nile fertilises Egypt by its black mud, whence it is called 'the black.' Ezekiel poetically saw it become a clear-flowing stream in the Messianic times."—*Geikie.* **"Their rivers to run like oil"**—their canals flow like oil—emblem of quietness, or sluggish action.

Ver. 16. **"This is the lamentation wherewith they shall lament her"**—frequently repeated. "This is a prophetical lamentation; yet so shall it come to pass."—*Grotius.*

Ver. 18. **"The daughters of the famous nations"**—the glorious nations themselves, some of whom are enumerated in the succeeding verses. They were as virgins, or daughters, once splendid in the bloom of youth, lovely to behold.

Ver. 19. **"Whom dost thou pass in beauty?"** "Beyond whom art thou lovely?"—*Hengstenberg.*—"Art thou any fairer than others?"—*Geikie.* **"Go down"**—to Sheol, the under-world, where all beauty is speedily marred.

Ver. 20. **"Draw her and all her multitudes"**—to the shades of the grave, ye powers of the under-world. As if addressing her executioners—*drag her forth to death.*

Ver. 21. **"The strong among the mighty shall speak to him"**—with a taunting welcome, as now one of themselves.

Ver. 22. "**Asshur is there and all her company—his graves are about him.**" "The abrupt change of gender is because Ezekiel has in view at one time the kingdom (feminine), at another the monarch. Assyria is placed first in punishment as being first in guilt."—*Fausset.* "The brightest example of greatness going to destruction."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 23. "**Whose graves are set in the sides of the pit.**" "In the depths of Sheol."—*Geikie.* "Deepest in guilt, they occupy the lowest depths."—*Fairbairn.* "The grave is deep even if, materially taken, it be only a few feet, as a stream is very deep if it be only six feet. The grave is deep enough to cover all glory."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 24. "**There is Elam.**" "Placed next as having been the auxiliary of Assyria. Its territory lay in Persia. In Abraham's time an independent kingdom (Gen. xiv. 1). Famous for its bowmen (Isa. xxii. 6)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 25. "**Slain by the sword.**" The very monotony of the same phraseology so often repeated gives to the dirge an awe-inspiring effect.

Ver. 26. "**Meshech, Tubal, and her multitude**"—the Moschi and Tibareni on the Pontic Mountains, between the Black and Caspian Seas.

Ver. 27. "**With their weapons of war.**" "The custom, regarded as significant by the prophet, prevailed among them, to bury their fallen warriors with their death-weapons, in which they have their misdeeds with them, so that guilt and punishment are united in the grave."—*Hengstenberg.* "**But their iniquities shall be upon their bones.**" "Their iniquities shall come upon their very bones."—*Geikie.* Their sword is buried with them bear witness of their violence, and of the retributive cause of their own humiliation.

Ver. 29. "**Edom and all her princes.**" Edom was not only governed by kings, but by subordinate princes or dukes (Gen. xxxvii. 40). This people had shown a malicious joy in the downfall of Judah. "**They shall lie with the uncircumcised.**" Though Edom was circumcised, being descended from Isaac, he shall lie with the uncircumcised.

Ver. 30. "**There be the princes of the north.**" "Syria, which is still called by the Arabs the north; or the Tyrians, north of Palestine, conquered by Nebuchadnezzar (chaps. xxvi.–xxviii.)"—*Grotius.* "**And all the Zidonians**"—who shared the fate of Tyre (chap. xxviii. 21).

Ver. 31. "**Pharaoh shall be comforted.**" "He sighs, is troubled. Others explain, He comforts himself. But Pharaoh could so much the less derive comfort from the view of the others, as they had been not his foes but his confederates on earth, and their defeat was at the same time his own."—*Hengstenberg.* Pharaoh's comfort was but a sigh.

Ver. 32. "**I have caused my terrors.**" Pharaoh was a long time terrible, not by his own power, but by the operation of God, who made use of him as His instrument. The terror he had been to others shall be experienced by himself and his people. "**He shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised.**" "Used up, Pharaoh is now destroyed by the same power which employed him before for its own ends. He has in the time of the power vouchsafed to him proved himself unclean and uncircumcised, and hence must share the fate of the uncircumcised."—*Hengstenberg.*

HOMILETICS.

THE TERRIBLENESS OF THE DIVINE VENGEANCE.

(Vers. 1–16.)

I. **Provoked by the reckless abuse of power** (ver. 2). Egypt is here represented as a young lion, or enraged crocodile working havoc by land and sea in sheer wantonness and prodigality of strength. The needs and enjoyments, the rights and privileges, of others are utterly disregarded in the reckless and excessive exercise of absolute power. Egypt had oppressed the people of God, and this was not forgotten. It had already measured its strength against the Asiatic forces, and had been checked in its ambitious projects. Its defeat abroad tended to intensify its tyranny at home, until its oppression and viciousness became unbearable. The day of retribution was at hand. It had roused the righteous anger of Heaven, and the fiat had gone forth—"Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord; shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" (Jer. v. 9).

II. **Seen in the utter ruin of a mighty nation.** 1. *Its power to harm others shall be crippled* (vers. 3–6.) In the graphic style of Ezekiel, Egypt is represented as a huge crocodile caught in a net, dragged from the waters, slung out upon the open field, and left stranded in the valley, its vast bulk spreading on the mountain-sides, the land soaked and the torrent-beds filled with the gushing-out of its blood, the birds and beasts of prey gorging themselves on its distended carcass. The great tyrant is now powerless to oppress, and is in the death-grip of the avenger. 2. *Its glory is quenched* (ver. 7, 8). The sun is veiled with clouds and the moon gives no light, the stars and all the shining lights of heaven become black, and darkness is poured over the land. The plague of darkness in a former age (Exod. x. 21–23), filling the people with awe while it lasted, was temporary; but the dense gloom that now settled upon the nation meant the permanent extinction of its brilliant career. 3. *Its desolation is complete* (vers. 11–15). The sword of the mighty will beat down the proud pomp of Egypt and destroy its people. The cattle that browsed beside its rivers shall be swept away, so that no foot of man or hoof of beast shall trouble these waters more. The waters shall then settle and grow clear and the canals flow like oil; no longer shall they descend violently, as the overflowing Nile, on other countries, but shall become still and sluggish in political action. The land shall be stripped of its abundance—"destitute of that whereof it was full"—and desolation shall reign supreme.

III. **Fills surrounding nations with dread** (vers. 9, 10). The rehearsal of Egypt's tragic fate shall paralyse the people of other lands with fear. Kings shall shake with terror and tremble continually, as if apprehensive that a similar punishment is impending over them. It shall then be evident that Egypt had a greater foe than Nebuchadnezzar, and one who could not be insulted and ignored with impunity. "Then shall they know that I am the Lord" (ver. 15). The desolating weapon was the sword of Babylon; but it was brandished by the arm of the invisible Jehovah. If men will not seek to know God in the tenderness of His mercy, they shall know Him in the severity of His judgment. "Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. He bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect" (Ps. xxxiii. 8, 10).

IV. Is the occasion of national sorrow. "This is the lamentation that they will raise; the daughters of the nations shall chant it: they will sing this dirge for Egypt and for all her multitude" (ver. 16).—*Geikie.* London witnessed the other day a remarkable military pageant, when the remains of Field-Marshal Lord Napier of Magdala, the hero of many a fierce battle fought for his country, were borne in funeral procession to their last resting-place in St. Paul's Cathedral. The packed masses of the people in the streets silently and sorrowfully saluting the coffin as it passed; the solemn, melting music of the Grenadiers and Scots Greys, the best musicians of the British army, playing the funeral march; the long lines of Guards in soldierly array, and the softened sunshine occasionally brightening the scene, made up a wonderfully imposing and impressive spectacle. In the presence of royalty and the highest magnates of the realm, and amid the tears of an appreciative people, the body of the great warrior was reverently placed alongside the tombs of heroes who had won distinction in many a hard-fought battle by land and sea. A nation may well mourn the loss of its brave defenders; but who can fathom the depths of grief of a people wildly lamenting over national disaster—the throne overturned, government disorganised, homes wrecked, the land ravaged by the ruthless destroyer, and chaos everywhere!

LESSONS.—1. *Divine vengeance is never inflicted without ample warning.* 2. *Is based on the highest principles of justice and equity.* 3. *Will be a terrible awakening to the impenitent wicked.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 2–16. "With the Chaldean conquest the political ascendancy of Egypt began finally to decline; the arm of its power was for ever broken; its monarch could no more move about as he pleased and trouble the nations; he was henceforth to reside in comparatively still and peaceful waters, himself on every hand restrained and hemmed in by superior force, and all his pride and glory, as the head of empire, reduced to perpetual desolation. It is Egypt's doom as a kingdom, not the mere condition of its soil and surface, that the prophet throughout has in view."—*Fairbairn.*

Vers. 2–10. **Difficulties and their Conquest.** 1. *Difficulties terrify the weak and indolent.* "Like a young lion—as a whale in the seas" (ver. 2). 2. *Difficulties are resolutely encountered by the brave and strong.* "I will spread My net over thee" (ver. 3). 3. *Great difficulties are not conquered without great havoc.* (1.) Their hugeness evident in their ruins (vers. 4–6). (2.) Their dazzling glamour quenched in darkness (vers. 7, 8). 4. *Conquered difficulties the admiration and the fear of others.*

Ver. 2. "**Take up a lamentation.**" "Ministers that would affect others with the things of God must make it appear that they are themselves affected with the miseries that sinners bring upon themselves by their sins. It becomes us to weep and tremble for those that will not weep and tremble for themselves, to try if thereby we may set them weeping, set them a-trembling."—*M. Henry.*

—"Like a young lion and crocodile"—"for pride, fierceness, and cruelty. Thou domineerest over sea and land, far and wide; thou playest *rex.*"—*Trapp.*

—"Troubledst the waters." "A great deal of disquiet is often given to the world by the restless ambition and implacable resentments of proud princes. Ahab is he that troubles Israel, and not Elijah. The princes and conquerors of this earth, who, like Pharaoh, gain a great name by aggres-

sion and violence, are no better in God's eyes than beasts which live by making the weaker their prey, or monsters of the deep which 'trouble the waters and foul the rivers' in pursuit of their victims."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 3. "A large, long, and wide net drawn out to full extent, with which both lions and crocodiles might be taken, and in which this lion and crocodile should certainly be taken, for God, whose hand never errs, will spread the net. In brief, war by land and sea, by a confederacy of many people against Hophra, shall be God's net, wherein he shall be taken, kept a prisoner as he was, and at last strangled."—*Pool.*

— "He will repay them in their own coin. 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword' (Matt. xxvi. 22). As they had spread their net over weaker peoples, with a company of many peoples, so God will spread out His net over them with a company of stronger people, the Chaldeans, who should bring them up as fishes caught in His net (Hab. i. 14–17)."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 7, 8. **Darkness.** 1. A symbol of destruction and mourning. 2. A proof of the awfulness and completeness of the destruction. 3. Suggests how all the forces of nature are subservient to the purpose of an avenging Deity.

— "As a torch is extinguished. A description of great sorrows, fears, troubles, and perplexities. Or it may intimate particularly the total ruin of the whole kingdom, in which the best, greatest, and noblest parts are: for heaven suppose the government, the sun the king, the moon the queen, the stars the princes and nobles, the bright lights the most eminent of the subjects for wisdom and understanding, and the land the common people. All shall be covered with clouds and darkness of misery and sorrow."—*Pool.*

Ver. 8. **I will involve thee, thy house, thy people, and the whole land in desolation and woe.**

Ver. 10. **Reasons for Fear.** 1. When conscious of personal sin. 2. When the sword of vengeance is brandished before our eyes. 3. When we witness the fall of the proud and great. 4. When in trembling uncertainty as to the nearness and manner of our approaching fate.

— "All they who had admired the grandeur and power of Egypt when the tidings of her destruction should be brought, would be 'amazed and horribly afraid.' The kings, whosoever were conscious of similar sins to those of Pharaoh, would 'tremble, every man for his own life, when the Lord should brandish His sword before them.' Those who admire the pomp of worldly greatness shall necessarily be astonished at its downfall, and shall tremble for themselves as involved in the same condemnation as the world which they love. But the fall of earthly things will not take by surprise nor alarm the children of God, whose portion is not in this world, and who know its real emptiness."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 12. "Spoil the pomp."—"Break her strength, rob her treasures, sack her cities, captivate her people, make the kingdom tributary, and so stain all her glory."—*Pool.*

Vers. 11–16. **The Desolation of the Sword.** 1. The occasion of savage delight to the warlike. 2. Silences the proud boaster. 3. Depreciates the value of human life. 4. The foe of commerce and national prosperity. 5. Is the theme of bitter lamentation among the suffering survivors.

Vers. 11, 12. "Those that delight in war and are on all occasions entering into contention may expect some time or other to be engaged with those who may prove too hard for them. Pharaoh had been forward to quarrel with his neighbours, and to come forth with his rivers—his armies. God will now give him enough of it."—*M. Henry.*

Ver. 13. "There should be so few men left in Egypt that they should

not, as formerly, disturb the waters by digging, swimming, or rowing on them; or no more trouble the waters with the passing of mighty armies over them to invade their neighbours; so few horses or cows that they should not at watering times, or in the heat of the day, foul the waters by running into them and stamping or trampling in them; but the waters should continue pure and undisturbed."—*Pool.*

Ver. 15. "God can soon empty those of this world's goods that have the greatest fulness of those things and are full of them; that enjoy most, and have their hearts set upon those enjoyments. The Egyptians were full of their pleasant and plentiful country and its rich productions. Every one that talked with them might perceive how much it filled them. But God can soon make their country 'destitute of that whereof it is full.' It is, therefore, our wisdom to be full of treasures in heaven."—*M. Henry.*

— "Then shall they know that I am the Lord." "The awful and destructive visitation shall be sanctified to those that survive; it shall yield them important instruction, and they shall give glory to My power and justice, while a sensible conviction of the vanity of the world, and of the fading and perishing nature of all things in it, shall draw their affections from it and from all that it contains, and induce them to seek an acquaintance with Me as their portion and happiness."—*Benson.*

HOMILETICS.

A Funeral Chant over the Graves of Fallen Nations.

(Vers. 17–32.)

In this paragraph Ezekiel, the prophet of the captivity, foresees the approaching downfall of the great monarchies who had oppressed and were then oppressing his beloved Israel. He sees them marching to the grave in slow and solemn funeral pomp, and as if standing by the huge sepulchre into which they disappear, chanted over them a sad, pathetic dirge which rises here and there into strains of the wildest and weirdest character. "The seers of Judah," writes Milman, "uttered their sublime funeral anthems over the greatness of each independent tribe or monarchy as it was swallowed up, first in the empire of Assyria, and then Chaldea. They were like the tragic chorus of the awful drama which was unfolding itself to the Eastern world." This funeral chant of Ezekiel's has in it more of sorrow than exultation. The old-world kingdoms, with all their tyranny and oppression, are not allowed to pass away without a sigh. He is friendless indeed who does not leave behind a solitary mourner. Observe—

I. **That the grave brings the proudest nationalities to a common level.** Egypt, with her sedate antiquity and stately pride; Assyria, with her vast empire and riches; Elam, with her strong-armed bowmen; Edom, with her fierce highlanders; and the princes and kinglets of the North—Meshech, Tubal, and the Zidonians—are all buried in the same earth over which their mighty armies tramped. The clash of arms, the flutter of banners, the noisy pomp of regal magnificence, the shout of triumph, and the groan of defeat are alike unheard and unheeded. The rules of etiquette, the rights of precedence and supremacy, about which so many bloody battles were fought, are now utterly meaningless.

II. **That the grave knows no distinction of persons.** Prince and peasant,

the general and the humblest soldier, the great in wisdom, wealth, and power, lie side by side with the common multitude; rich and poor, circumcised and uncircumcised, are huddled together in the same capacious sepulchre. The Egyptian, with his fastidious notions of cleanliness, shrank from the contamination of the uncircumcised, but the grave effectually cured all such scruples. The reflective Cyrus, the great Persian conqueror, saw how completely the grave would strip him of his imperial glory when he ordered this inscription to be engraven on his tomb—"O man! whatsoever thou art, and whencesoever thou comest, I know that thou wilt come to the same condition in which I now am. I am Cyrus, who brought the empire to the Persians: do not envy me, I beseech thee, this little piece of ground which covereth my body!"

III. **That the grave reveals the vanity of national strife and ambition.** Questions of boundaries, official privilege, insulted honour, or tarnished fame dwindle into utter insignificance. Great warriors have cherished to the last the memory of their victories and parted reluctantly with the trophies of their ambition. A king of Prussia, conscious of the near approach of death, desired to see his army defile before him for the last time, and his couch was moved to a window where by reflection in a mirror he was able to take a last adieu of his troops as they marched past; and it is said that Napoleon Bonaparte ordered himself to be seated on his deathbed and arrayed in military dress that he might meet the King of Terrors as he had been accustomed to meet his mortal foes. In the grave all military glory is for ever quenched. Philip III. of Spain, who strove to do his duty as king, once said he would rather lose his kingdom than willingly offend God. Convinced of the vanity of all imperial ambitions in comparison with the claims of religion, he broke forth with the lament—"Would to God I had never reigned! Oh that those years I have spent in my kingdom I had lived a solitary life in the wilderness! Oh that I had lived a life alone with God! What doth all my glory profit, but that I have so much the more torment in my death!"

IV. **That it is but meagre comfort to the fallen that in the grave they share the same fate as those who have been as great as they** (ver. 31). Yet this is all the comfort some will have: it was all that proud Egypt found. It is no satisfaction and but little relief to the sufferer to know that many others suffer with him. In this verse there is a clear indication of *a consciousness after death*. This indestructible consciousness will be the vehicle of future joy or sorrow.

LESSONS.—1. *National reverses evoke sympathy.* 2. *The grave suggests many salutary reflections.* 3. *The highest and best work we do survives the tragedy of the grave.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 17–32. "Thus closes the Divine word against Pharaoh and his kingdom; they go down to the land of forgetfulness in common with all the surrounding heathen who stood in a position of rivalry or antagonism to Israel. Throughout the whole series of the predictions we find the one grand point of difference between the two parties steadily kept in view; the judgment that lights on Israel is only partial and temporary, the power and dominion again return to him and settle in everlasting possession, while the neighbouring kingdoms that in turn aspired to the supremacy fall to rise no more. The question virtually discussed in all such predictions is this

—Who shall give law to the world; Israel, or the rival nations of heathendom? And the answer returned, though with manifold variety of form, is perpetually the same. All other dominions are destined to pass away; that of Israel alone becomes permanent and universal. This is to be sought only in Christ, in whom all that peculiarly belonged to Israel concentrates itself and rises to its proper perfection. In Him, therefore, it is that the pre-eminence destined for Israel has its accomplishment, and all the external victories gained over the surrounding heathen, or the advantages granted to Israel in preference to them, were but the sign and prelude of that glorious ascendancy over the whole earth which in right is already Christ's, and in due time shall also be His in actual possession."—*Fairbairn.*

—"The prophet in this funeral song brings Egypt into connection with the congeries of nations on which the Chaldean judgment fell. The practical aim is expressed in the words of the Psalmist—'Trust not in oppression and fraud; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.' The prophecy is fitted to call forth a deep feeling of the vanity of earthly things; to warn against carnal confidence in earthly power and its abuse by violence and wrong; and, what comes specially into account here, to guard against envying those who enjoy such power for the moment. Human nature, what is it? In an hour it falls to the ground!"—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 18. "The Egyptians affected to be buried either in the isle Chemnis or in the Pyramids. Their kings and great ones thus would be laid by themselves, but Ezekiel provides them their grave among common people—buries them where they fall. They shall not have what they account so much of in their funeral."—*Pool.*

"Where they an equal honour share,
Who buried or unburied are;
Where Agamemnon knows no more
Than Irus, he condemned before;
Where fair Achilles and Thersites lie,
Equally naked, poor, and dry."

Ver. 19. **Beauty.** 1. A rare endowment, whether national or personal. 2. No modern type that has not been equalled in the past. 3. No protection against the ravages of time. 4. Undistinguishable when the grave has done its work. 5. Its possession no ground for vain boasting.

—"'Art thou better than others that thou shouldst not die and be laid in dust? Speak, Hophra, if thou hast any privilege to plead, what hast thou to say why thou shouldst not go down to the pit as a despised mortal?' The prophet, hearing no plea of privilege, says sarcastically, '*Go down;* take up thy lodging, thy long, dark, dismal recess, where thy dust and bones shall never be known by any royal figure.'"—*Pool.*

—"How little does it signify whether a mummy be well embalmed, wrapped round with rich stuff, and beautifully painted on the outside or not! Go down into the tombs, examine the niches, and see whether one dead carcass be preferable to another."—*A. Clarke.*

Ver. 20. "Make no ceremony more than usually is made when common soldiers, slain in the field where the battle is fought, are dragged by scores into mighty pits and thrown into them promiscuously, or, suppose any of them unwilling to stoop, draw them to it against their will."—*Pool.*

Vers. 21–32. **The Grim Welcome of the Dead.** A welcome. 1. *To the great majority*—"All her multitude." 2. *To defeat*—"Slain by the sword." 3. *To humiliation and shame*—"They lie with the uncircumcised, though they caused terror in the land of the living." 4. *To whatever comfort may be found in sharing the same fate as great conquerors*—"Pharaoh shall see them and be comforted."

Vers. 22–26. "His graves are about him." **The Graves of our Kindred.** 1. Recall many tender memories of affection, acts of kindness, and words of counsel received from those who sleep so peacefully there. 2. Arrest

the tendency to reproach those who are gone for any injustice they may have done to us when living. 3. Remind us we shall soon be called to share their resting-place, and how utterly useless all worldly gain, power, and reputation will be to us there. 4. While reverently bending over them we should solemnly resolve, by God's help, to seek that glorious immortality which the grave is powerless to destroy.

Ver. 23. "All which caused terror" —"where a terror to all they would be enemies to, and proudly boasted of and inhumanly used their power, now lie quiet, their dust little regarded, less feared, and least of all pitied."—*Pool.*

Ver. 27. "With their weapons of war." "It was usual in former times to put swords, shields, and other armour in the graves of military men, as they did in the grave of Theseus and on the bier of Alexander the Great. But the meaning of the prophet here is, that those of whom he speaks should be without these usual martial solemnities with which people formerly honoured their dead."—*Benson.*

Ver. 32. "It is God who speaks, who had punished former tyrants, that the world might see His just judgments. They were a terror to the world by their cruelty, oppression, and continued violence; by their covetousness, ambition, and pride; and God had made them a terror by His just severities in their punishment."—*Pool.*

— "Surely men disquiet themselves about a vain thing in so keenly pursuing pleasure, gain, fame, and power, at the cost of their immortal souls. What will all these objects of worldly men's pursuit do for them when they are laid in the grave? Lord, do Thou teach us the blessedness of having Thee as our portion for ever!"—*Fausset.*

Ezekiel's Commission Renewed. (Chap. xxxiii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 2. "Speak to the children of thy people." "The prophet turns from foreign nations to Israel again. The early portion of the chapter (vers. 2–20) seems to have been imparted to Ezekiel on the evening previous to the arrival of the news of the downfall of Jerusalem (ver. 22), and was a preparation for the latter part (vers. 23–33) imparted after the messenger had come. This accounts for the former part standing without date, which was properly reserved for the latter part. 'If the people of the land take a man of their coasts and set him for their watchman.' The men were themselves to appoint the watchman, whence, in case they did not give heed to him, they withstood and strove against themselves, and so should be more convicted of their guilt and folly."—*Lange.*

Ver. 3. "If when he seeth the sword come"—invaders. An appropriate illustration at the time of the invasion of Judea by Nebuchadnezzar. —"He blow the trumpet"—a horn, with clear resounding tone (Joshua vi.).

Ver. 4. "His blood shall be upon his own head." "He will be to blame for his own fall. The head is named from the custom of carrying on the head. Blood often stands for blood-guilt."—*Hengstenberg.* According to others, the image is derived from sacrifice, in which the offerer transferred his guilt to his victim by laying his hand on the victim's head (Lev. i. 4; xxiv. 14; Matt. xxvii. 25).

Ver. 5. "But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul." The alone self-guiltiness of the individual is here made still more manifest.

Ver. 6. "He is taken away in his iniquity." "Mishap befalls no one undeserved, even if under the circumstances he might have been delivered. But the unfaithful watchman is punished for his neglect."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 7. "I have set thee a watchman." The "I" is emphatic. Ezekiel's appointment to be a watchman *spiritually* is far more solemn, as it is derived *from God*, not from *the people*. The lesson is, that the relation between the prophet (and in general the servant of God in His kingdom) and the people is one full of responsibility. **"Thou shalt hear the word at My mouth and warn them from Me."** "Safety therefore demanded that the prophet have free speech. That God should have given them a true seer in their midst was a sure proof of His favour, which might well keep off despair. Jehovah would fain save the wicked, and threatens wrath through His prophet only that every one may take heed and reform."—*Geikie.*

Ver. 11. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." To meet the Jews' cry of despair in ver. 10 Ezekiel here cheers them by the assurance that God has no pleasure in their death, but that they should repent and live (2 Peter iii. 9). "A yearning tenderness manifests itself here, notwithstanding all their past sins; yet with it a holiness that abates nothing of its demands for the honour of God's authority."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 12. "The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression." "Self-righteousness, ever disposed to justify itself, had adopted among the exiles a comfortable theory that they were punished for the sins of their forefathers rather than for their own. Ezekiel again exposes this deception, as he had done before (chap. iii. 20; xviii. 24, 26, 27)."—*Geikie.* "The heart that in distress misunderstands its God will not tread the path of repentance, which determines the return of salvation; and man is quite prone to mitigate his guilt and to think that God has dealt too hardly with him."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 21. "In the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month"—a year and a half after the capture of the city (Jer. xxxix. 2; li. 5, 6), which took place in the eleventh year and fourth month. "The one who escaped may have been so long on the road through fear of entering the enemy's country" (*Henderson*); or, the *singular* is used for the *plural* in a collective sense. "Naturally the reopening of the prophet's mouth for consolation would be deferred till the number of the escaped remnant was complete: the removal of such a large number would easily have occupied seventeen or eighteen months."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 22. "The hand of the Lord was upon me in the evening." Thus the capture of Jerusalem was known to Ezekiel by revelation, before the messenger came. **"My mouth was opened and I was no more dumb."** He spake the message from God to the people contained in vers. 2–20 in the evening before the tidings came.

Ver. 24. "Those wastes of the land of Israel." "Less Jerusalem itself than the other cities which had been stripped of their inhabitants (Jer. xxxiii. 10, 13), in which those who were without possessions (Jer. xxxix. 10) shared with the returned fugitives (Jer. xl. 12), having all at once come to great wealth of land and were puffed up."—*Hitzig.* "That there were such people is proved by the revolt in which Gedaliah, the Chaldean governor, was slain."—*Hengstenberg.* Compare also the representation in Neh. i. of the desolate condition of things, though an interval of upwards of a century had elapsed. **"Abraham was one, and he inherited the land, but we are many."** "Some of the bands of fighting-men which had escaped the Chaldeans, not improbably stood aloof, keeping the country disturbed by harassing forays. But, like true Jews, even their robber life was dignified by a religious colouring. Few though they were, they fancied there was no reason to despair, since the land had been given to Abraham when he was alone in the midst of the whole population, a much more hopeless position than theirs.

Ezekiel, however, predicted a terrible end to these visionaries."—*Geikie.*

Ver. 25. "**Ye eat with the blood.**" "The eating of the blood was forbidden in Gen. ix. 4 as the first step to the prohibition of murder. In the blood of animals was to be seen a type of the blood of men. The prescription had a didactic end. It was to call forth an abhorrence of shedding human blood. Whosoever disregarded this prohibition showed, under the Old Testament, after the law had made the horror of animal blood national, that the germ of the murderous spirit was in him."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 26. "**Ye work abomination.**" The abomination is adultery. The feminine form of the verb is surprising.

Ver. 28. "**That none shall pass through.**" Cleared of men, even of passing travellers. The ravage of robbers and wild beasts rendered the ordinary roads unsafe.

Ver. 30. "**The children of thy people still are talking against thee.**" Though going to the prophet to hear the word of the Lord, they criticised, in an unfriendly spirit, his peculiarities of manner and enigmatical style (chap. xx. 49), making these the excuse for their impenitence. "**By the walls and in the doors of the houses.**" In the public haunts and privately.

Ver. 31. "**As My people.**" "So respectful, attentive, and apparently earnest and willing."—*Hengstenberg.* Ironically, those who *should* be mine; or, as if they would be My people and still are not. "**With their mouth they show much love.**" "They deal tenderly with their mouth — they show ardour; affect in words an ardent love to God and His words, while the real inclination of their heart goes quite another way—is turned to Mammon, the god of the Jewish old man."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 32. "**Thou art unto them as a very lovely song**"—a song of love, a lover's song. "They praise thy eloquence, but care not for the subject of it as a real and personal thing, just as many do in the modern Church."—*Jerome.* "**One that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument.**" "Amidst the national impoverishment they amuse themselves with the surpassing rhetorical gifts of the new classic."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 33. "**That a prophet hath been among them.**" "No mere orator. The difference they discover in painful experience when it is too late. The threatened punishment has already overtaken them. They are already excluded from the promised salvation which can be gained only by true repentance."—*Hengstenberg.*

HOMILETICS.

The Offices of the Civil and Spiritual Watchman Compared and Contrasted.

(Vers. 1–9.)

Having sung in strains of unequalled sublimity the dirge of the great monarchies, Ezekiel returns with redoubled intensity to the duty of teaching. The enthusiastic disciple of Jeremiah, he carries out to their most startling consequences the principles but dimly sketched in the creed of his loved master. In this chapter he develops in increased sharpness of definition and fulness of detail the doctrine which is the prominent feature of his prophetic mission—that of the responsibility of the individual soul separate from the collective nation, separate from the good or ill deserts of ancestry. "Other prophets,"

says Stanley, "have more of poetical beauty, a deeper sense of Divine things, a tenderer feeling of the mercies of God for His people. None teach so simply, and with a simplicity the more remarkable from the elaborate imagery out of which it emerges, this great moral lesson, to us the first of all lessons. On this narrow but solid plank of the doctrine of human responsibility Ezekiel crosses the chasm which divided the two parts of his eventful life. It is almost the last doctrine which we hear announced before his country fell. It is the first that meets us as he recovers from the shock after all is over." This truth we shall find strikingly illustrated in the teaching of the present and succeeding paragraphs of this chapter. In these verses we have *the offices of the civil and spiritual watchman compared and contrasted*—

I. **In the manner of their appointment.** 1. *The civil watchman is appointed by the careful discrimination of his fellow-countrymen.* "The people of the land take a man of their coasts and set him for their watchman" (ver. 2). It is a mutual arrangement. The rulers of the state see the need of guarding its interests, and after due inquiry select the man who in their judgment is best qualified to discharge the duties required, and the man willingly accepts the post. It is a human appointment, and the fount of authority is human, though sanctioned by the aggregate wisdom of the governing body. The government may be mistaken in the character of the man selected. They can only do their best in providing for the immediate exigencies of the state; or they may err in their conception of the trust with which they invest their officer. Human wisdom is at the best imperfect. 2. *The spiritual watchman is Divinely appointed.* "I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel" (ver. 7). Here the authority is supreme and infallible. The Divine discernment is unerring. God never calls and commissions the wrong man, and never appoints His servant to a work that He does not at the same time give him power to do, however unwilling he may be to accept the responsibility. The authority thus delegated is indisputable, because backed by supreme power, and from which there is no appeal. The office of the spiritual watchman is superior to all earthly governments, and has often to be exercised above and in opposition to their worldly policy.

II. **In the duties assigned to each.** 1. *To exercise constant vigilance.* "When he seeth the sword come upon the land" (ver. 3). "Thou shalt hear the word at My mouth" (ver. 7). It is the duty of each to be ever in a wakeful, listening attitude. The look-out on board the ocean-steamer and the advanced night-picket of a slumbering army has each a responsible post. The safety of both vessel and army depends upon their keenness of vision and delicacy of hearing. It is their duty to detect the first indications of danger. The duties of the civil and spiritual watchman are alike in demanding a highly sensitive alertness and heroic fidelity. The excavations at Herculaneum, buried by an eruption of Vesuvius more than eighteen hundred years ago, revealed the figure of a sentinel who remained immovable at the post of duty till swathed and suffocated with the molten lava. 2. *To give distinct and timely warning.* "Blow the trumpet and warn the people" (ver. 3). "Warn them from Me" (ver. 7). It is not enough to keep a sharp look-out. Every threatened movement of the enemy must be faithfully reported, and a loud, clear, earnest warning sounded when the slightest advance is made by the attacking force. The watchman should be every moment braced up to duty, and no indulgence permitted that will impair his faculties. The greater the peril, the more urgent and unmistakable should be the alarm.

III. **In the reality and limitation of the responsibility of each.** If the watchman, seeing the threatened evil, neglects to warn the people, he is respon-

sible for the calamities they may suffer; if he warns the people and they suffer by not giving heed to the warning, he himself is clear of blame (vers. 4–6, 8, 9). Ezekiel, while explicit in teaching what in his day was the novel doctrine of personal responsibility, is careful to define its limits. Unlimited responsibility would be intolerable; it would tend to paralyse rather than evoke effort. Personal responsibility is ever limited by ability, opportunity, and the nature and scope of the trust with which we are invested. There is no discharge from responsibility but by obedience to obvious duty. The burden is then transferred to those towards whom duty has been faithfully fulfilled.

LESSONS.—1. *The true watchman is placed in a position of great honour and responsibility.* 2. *Should preserve all his faculties in the highest possible state of healthy development and exercise.* 3. *Is faithful in the degree in which he retains the consciousness of his Divine call.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–9. **Individual Responsibility**—1. *Recognised by the directness of the Divine revelation.* "The word of the Lord came unto *me*" (ver. 1). 2. *Augmented by the importance of the office in which he is installed.* "The people of the land take a man and set him for their watchman. I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel" (vers. 2, 7). 3. *Is limited to the faithful discharge of specific duties.* To be on the alert, to raise the alarm, to warn of approaching disaster (vers. 3–5, 9). 4. *Involves serious blame when obvious duty is neglected.* "His blood will I require at thine hand" (vers. 6, 8).

— "The duty of the spiritual watchman is to warn faithfully the impenitent of their imminent danger, and of the willingness of God to receive them graciously and save them freely if they will repent. Whosoever hears the watchman's warning and yet takes no heed to it shall perish, and his blood shall be upon his own head. But the minister who knows the danger that is before sinners, and yet neglects to sound the faithful note of warning, shall not only be in part the cause of their ruin, but shall also bring upon his own head an awful condemnation. *They* no doubt justly perish on account of their neglect to watch and pray continually; but *he* incurs at once the guilt of his own and that of their disobedience to God. What a heavy account they shall have to render who make excuses for sin, flatter sinners, and promise them pardon and peace without penitence and faith!"—*Fausset.*

Ver. 2. "Take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman." **A National Guardian.** 1. An important officer in time of public danger. 2. Is selected for some special qualifications he possesses above other of his countrymen. 3. The safety of the country is entrusted to his care. 4. Should be vigilant and faithful in the discharge of duty. 5. Is accountable for his conduct to those who appoint him.

— "One man may be of public service to a whole country. Princes and statesmen are the watchmen of a kingdom, that are continually to employ and, if occasion be, expose themselves for the public safety."—*M. Henry.*

— "The calling to the office of preacher is twofold—one immediate, the other mediate; the former is from God, the latter from man (Acts xxvi. 15, 16; vi. 5). No blind man, nor dreamer, nor drowsy sleeper is fit for an office that takes its name from wakefulness."—*Lange.*

Vers. 4, 5. **Faithful Warning**—1. Should be clearly and earnestly uttered. 2. Secures the safety of those who give heed to it. 3. Is uttered in vain to those who neglect it. 4. Deprives the heedless of any ground of complaint for the suffering he refused to avoid.

Ver. 6. **Neglect of Duty**—1. Inexcusable where the duty is clearly defined and publicly proclaimed. 2. An unmistakable evidence of moral deterioration. 3. Always involves calamity and suffering to somebody.

— "Of the watching which is enjoined upon ourselves we are not relieved by the obligation which lies upon the watchman. Hence he who is overtaken unwarned does not fall guiltless, for his security and carelessness were the occasion of his fall. Contempt of danger is no true courage. Every one must carry his soul as in his hand. What a mournful condition is it when the Church does not watch, the State does not protect, the house does not admonish!"—*Lange.*

Vers. 7–9. **The Ministerial Calling**—1. *Divine in its institution.* "I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel." 2. *Is to interpret the meaning of the Divine Message.* "Thou shalt hear the word at My mouth." 3. *Should be faithful in warning as well as in instruction.* "And warn them from Me—speak to warn the wicked from his way." 4. *Involves grave responsibility.* "That wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." 5. *Retains the Divine approval only so far as it is strictly faithful.* "But thou hast delivered thy soul."

— "With a spiritual watchman there must be found a spiritual life, a spiritual light, a spiritual wakefulness, and dutiful fidelity in all parts of his office."—*Starke.*

— Even when the preacher's conscience is free from guilt in regard to the ungodly who perish in their sins, what a sorrow does it occasion in the life of the preacher when he has to see the impenitent die in their sins! "I would not willingly be saved," said Augustine, "without you."

HOMILETICS.

The Unswerving Equity of the Divine Government.

(Vers. 10–20.)

I. Is joined with the most tender solicitations for the best welfare of men. 1. *Jehovah has no satisfaction in the ruin of the sinner* (vers. 10. 11). It is a false conception of God to regard Him as implacable and difficult to propitiate. Such a view is possible only to the mind debased by sinful indulgence and hardened by unbelief. Without man's solicitation, and without his daring to hope for such favour, God offers him life and salvation, and reveals His love in the wondrous plan which His spontaneous mercy has provided for the redemption of the sinning race. So slow is man to comprehend, and so little reason had he to expect the possibility of such kindness being shown to him, that Jehovah solemnly pledges the integrity of His Divine character in assuring him of the fact—"As I live, saith the Lord." He has more pleasure in pardoning than punishing. 2. *Jehovah condescends to plead with the sinner to turn from his iniquities and accept life.* "Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" (ver. 11). Amazing spectacle! Incredulous condescension! God pleading with man—the highest reason expostulating with human folly and unreason! The monarch imploring rebels to return to their allegiance and the parent entreating the prodigal to reform may seem the despair of baffled helplessness. But not so with our Heavenly King and Father. His condescension is all the more conspicuous and significant because He is so strong, so righteous, and so unselfish in His aim to rescue man from his self-delusion and ruin. A greater marvel still is, that in the presence of this Divine solicitude

man remains obdurate and indifferent. How deceitful and deadly an enemy is fondly-cherished sin!

II. **Recognises the responsibility of the individual soul.** "I will judge you every man after his ways" (ver. 20). Life or death depends on individual action. Israel is to be treated no longer as a collective nation, in the mass, but as individuals, each one by himself. This doctrine was so novel and startling to the Jew, and so opposed to his notion of special privileges to be enjoyed by the aggregate nation, irrespective of the moral condition of individuals, that the masters of the Synagogue hesitated to receive the Book of Ezekiel into the sacred canon, and when it was adopted, decreed that it should not be read by any Jew who was not above thirty years of age. And yet throughout the Bible there is no truth more clearly taught than this. It is this responsibility that gives a moral character to each man's actions, and is the basis on which he must be ultimately judged.

III. **Distributes with exact impartiality reward and punishment according to individual conduct** (vers. 12–16, 18, 19). The seeming righteous will not escape punishment if they sin (vers. 12, 13, 18). The wicked will not be denied reward if they reform (vers. 12, 14–16, 19). No man can shelter himself under the shadow of ancestral piety, or under the reputation of a blameless life. Personal virtue can make no atonement for a single sin. On the other hand, the most abandoned need not despair. The Lord "pardoneth and absolveth all those who truly repent and unfeignedly believe His holy gospel." The final decisions of the Divine government cannot be charged with the least injustice, but will compel universal adoration.

IV. **Is the subject of querulous complaint by the wrong-doer.** "Yet the people say, The way of the Lord is not equal; but, as for them, their way is not equal" (vers. 17, 20). Wrong-doing blinds the mental vision, dulls and vitiates the moral sense, and incapacitates the soul from exercising righteous judgment. Ignorance is always obstinately one-sided. Reminds one of the Irish juryman who had never met eleven such obstinate men as his fellow-jurors; and of the recruit who maintained he was the only man of his company who was keeping step. The sinner is ready to blame any one but himself, and even dares to impugn the equity of the great Judge of all the earth. The reckless audacity of such a charge reveals his own condemnation.

LESSONS.—1. *Divine justice and mercy are inseparable.* 2. *If we embrace the principles of the Divine government it becomes easy to do right and difficult to do wrong.* 3. *The destiny of every man is, under God, in his own hands.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 10, 11. A yearning tenderness here manifests itself, still seeking, notwithstanding all that has taken place, the return of those who survived to the way of peace. But with that tenderness what a stern and unflinching holiness! There can be no relaxation or abatement mentioned in respect to this, not even amid the moanings of pain and cries of distress which arose from the people; no return to life possible but through a return to righteousness.

Ver. 10. **Unrepented Sin**—1. Produces a sullen disposition. 2. Fosters the mistaken notion that we are punished for the sins of others rather than for our own. 3. Reflects upon the sincerity of the Divine promises. 4. Fills the soul with despair.

— "Thus ye speak." "But not well, whilst ye have hard thoughts of God and heavy thoughts of yourselves, as if your sins were unpardonable, and that ye were already ruined beyond relief; whereas true repentance is a ready remedy, a plank after shipwreck that would set you safe and render you right again. This they had been told before (chap. xviii.), but to little purpose. The word was not mingled with faith in their hearts, and did therefore run through them (Heb. ii. 1) as water runs through a riven vessel."—*Trapp.*

— "It is common with those that have been hardened with presumption, when they were warned against sin, to sink into despair when they are called to repent, and to conclude there is no hope of life for them."—*M. Henry.*

— "All in the end feel sin, but they hate it not.—The way of the unconverted in this respect is to look rather to the temporal than to the eternal life.—To despair, instead of turning to God, is but another form of the pride that is in the human heart.—Despair is another kind of impenitence.—How contrasts touch one another!—The godly also are sometimes on the brink of despair—David, Ps. xxxviii., and Cain, Gen. iv. That punishment should always be heavier to us than sin!—He who would justify himself would perhaps throw the blame even upon God.—God always deals unfairly with the wicked, as they think."—*Lange.*

Ver. 11. The Pitifulness of the Divine Mercy—1. *Finds no delight in punishing.* "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." 2. *Yearns for the recovery of those who have abandoned the way of obedience.* "But that the wicked turn from his way and live." 3. *Breaks forth in tenderest persuasiveness.* "Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die?" 4. *Is declared with the most solemn asseveration.* "As I live, saith the Lord."

— "This is one of those precious places, those mellifluous honeycombs which we should go on sucking towards heaven, as Samson once did towards his parents (Judges xiv. 9). Here, if anywhere, we may find strong consolation. God when He swears desires certainly to be credited. O happy we for whose sakes God vouchsafeth to swear! and O wretched we if we believe not God, no, though He swear to us!"—*Trapp.*

— "The living God wills life, and also gives it to those who will; but unless men also wish it, He certainly does not give."—*Lange.*

— "Why will ye die?"—"I have been to you a nursing Father. Will ye not love Me? I have opened a bleeding altar, even Calvary, that the foulest of sinners may approach. Why will ye stay at a distance in shame and sin? I have borne and had patience. I have stretched out My hands all the day long to a gainsaying people. My prophets have laboured and wept; they aver, being filled with My Spirit, that their hearts' desire and prayer is, that Israel might be saved. Why will you resist the ministry of grace? I have aided the ministry with slow and gentle corrections. Why will you fight against Me? You are beloved for your fathers' sake; you have been to Me a pleasant vineyard. I have planted you with the choice vine of Sorek; and what could I have done for My vineyard that I have not done? Why then will ye prefer idols to Me? Why will you prefer shame to glory, death to eternal life?"—*Sutcliffe.*

Ver. 13. "It was a widespread delusion among the Jews that they possessed a hereditary righteousness; that whatever they themselves might be, yet the righteousness of their pious fathers, from Abraham down, would avail them; and if they experienced the contrary in their misfortunes they held themselves justified in murmuring against God. The prophet teaches, on the contrary, that the fate of every generation is determined by its own relation to God."—*Hengstenberg.*

— "Many eminent professors have been ruined by a proud conceitedness of themselves and confidence in them

selves. He trusts to the merit of his own righteousness, and thinks he has already made God so much his debtor that now he may venture to commit iniquity, for he has righteousness enough in stock to make amends for it; he fancies that, whatever evil deeds he may do hereafter, he can be in no danger from them, having so many good deeds beforehand to balance them. He thinks himself so well established in a course of virtue that he may thrust himself into any temptation and it cannot overcome him, and so by presuming on his own sufficiency he is brought to commit iniquity."—*M. Henry.*

— "Not that we are evil by nature is what finally condemns us, but that we remain evil in spite of the goodness of God which seeks our conversion."—*Lange.*

Vers. 14, 15. **Genuine Repentance**—1. Is not only sorrow for sin, but a turning from it. 2. A striving to do the right. 3. Shown in the restitution of all wrongfully acquired goods. 4. A permanent blessing only by walking in harmony with the living Word.

— **Conversion**—"1. Of heart. 2. Of conduct. 3. Of life."—*Lange.*

— "Penitency is almost as good as innocency."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 15. "Robbery and violence would be too gainful a trade if a man might quit all scores by repentance and detain all he had gotten; or if the father's repentance might serve the turn, and the benefit of the transgression be transmitted as an inheritance to the son. If the pledge remained it must be restored. The retaining it is committing a new iniquity, and forfeits any benefit of the promise. If he hath it not, nor is able to procure it, his hearty repentance is enough, with reparation; but to enjoy the spoil and yet to profess repentance is an affront to Almighty God, and a greater sin than the first act of violence, when he did not pretend to think of God, and so did not think of displeasing Him. Whereas now he pretends to reconcile himself to God and mocks Him with repentance, while he retains the fruit of his wickedness. He who is truly penitent restores what he hath left to the person who was deprived of it, and pays the rest in devout sorrow for his trespass."—*Lord Clarendon.*

Vers. 17, 20. **False Estimates**—1. Inevitable when Divine things are measured by a human standard. 2. The product of a mind warped with error and sin. 3. Recoil in punishment upon those who are blind to their own falseness and injustice.

Ver. 17. "When men find fault with the ways of God as not equal, it is because their own ways are not equal. On the other hand, God says, 'Do not My words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' (Micah ii. 7). God 'meeteth him that worketh righteousness; those that remember God in His ways' (Isa. lxiv. 5). The cause of sceptical cavils at the ways of Divine providence and grace lies in the unbeliever's faulty state of heart which corrupts the understanding."—*Faussett.*

HOMILETICS.

The Infatuation of Unbelief.

(Vers. 21–33.)

I. Blinds the soul to the significance of passing events. 1. *The greatest calamity is not understood.* "The city is smitten" (ver. 21). No greater disaster could happen to the Jew. The impregnable, the invincible Jerusalem in ruins, the sacred Temple violated and destroyed—impossible! Yet the impossible had happened; and the people, stupefied by the greatness of the calamity, or by

the inveteracy of their wickedness, failed to grasp the meaning. In their unbelieving infatuation they could not see that the Divine guardianship that encompassed the city with a shield that no mortal enemy could pierce had been withdrawn, because of their sins. 2. *The plainest evidences of faithful warning were ignored.* Ezekiel predicted that he would be silent for some time on matters affecting Israel until news of the downfall of Jerusalem came. The prediction was exactly fulfilled, and he once more opens his mouth concerning Israel (comp. chap. xxiv. 27 with xxxiii. 22)—another proof of the Divine sanction to the warnings of His servant; yet this, like many other similar evidences, was unheeded. We are infatuated indeed when passing events cease to interest us and suggest no lessons of either warning or counsel.

II. **Intensifies the practice of the grossest sins** (vers. 24–26). 1. *Covetousness* (ver. 24). They cling in a spirit of desperate covetousness to the land already lost, and which now belonged to their conquerors. The savage greed with which the scattered few held by the land of their forefathers might excite compassion did we not know how hopeless was their task and how utterly selfish their aim. They wished to keep the land not to reform but to indulge abuses. 2. *Idolatry* (ver. 25). The sin which had been the occasion of all the distresses that now afflicted the land, instead of being put away, was carried on with aggravated enormities. 3. *Tyranny.* "Ye stand upon your sword" (ver. 26). They do not seek to rule on principles of right and equity, but by the tyranny of force and arms. It was the wild anarchy of reckless desperadoes. The tyranny was all the more cruel because of the unprotected and helpless condition of the few that still remained in the land. 4. *The worst form of immorality* (ver. 26). *Adultery.* How deep was the degradation of the chosen people of God when they descended to the worst practices of the heathen, and veiled them under the sacred name of religion! Unbelief is immorality, and abandons man to the tyranny of all kinds of abominations.

III. **Invokes a more terrible punishment** (vers. 27–29). Ruin shall be piled on ruin; the wastes shall be reduced to more hopeless wastes; desolation shall reign supreme. By an inevitable retribution, the sword on which they placed their chief dependence and with which they had oppressed the weak shall be the instrument of their own destruction, and the pestilence shall finish the work left undone by the sword. The desolating ruin shall be so complete that the fields and vineyards, once so peacefully cultivated and so abundantly productive, shall be the haunts of wild beasts and the terrified inhabitants become their prey. Travellers will be careful to avoid the infested region: "None shall pass through" (ver. 28). Terrible indeed will be the punishment that shall overtake the obstinately unbelieving.

IV. **Makes mockery of the most earnest utterances of the Divine message** (vers. 30–32). 1. *There is the show of charmed interest in the messenger.* "They come unto thee as the people cometh; they sit before thee as My people. With their mouth they show much love. Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument" (vers. 31, 32). Their interest in the preacher is superficial, like that of many present-day hearers. They are pleased with a rich, musical voice, with oratorical eloquence, with dramatic posturings, with ritualistic display and full choral effects; and that is all. It is the same kind of pleasure they have in listening to a well-rendered song, or a solo on the violin by an accomplished performer. The serious meaning of the message and its application to their practical life they have no desire to understand. 2. *They make sport of both messenger and message in public and private.* "The children of thy people still are talking

against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying—(with a chuckling contemptuousness that reveals the hollowness and baseness of their hypocritical concern)—Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord" (ver. 30). An invitation, not to ponder the Divine message, but to listen to their garbled version of it, as they reproduce it with flippant sportiveness and grotesque caricature. It is a sad evidence how completely unbelief has degraded and infatuated the soul when the message that deals with its eternal interests is made the subject of fun and ridicule. 3. *They are too far steeped in infamy to attempt to practise what they hear.* "They hear thy words, but they will not do them; their heart goeth after their covetousness" (vers. 31, 32). They love sin more than godliness. To give heed to the Divine message would break in unpleasantly on the round of self-indulgence with which they are encircled as with an iron band. They have resisted so many appeals that the heart has become as hard as adamant. "How dangerous it is," wrote John Foster, the celebrated essayist, "to defer those momentous reformations which conscience is solemnly preaching to the heart! If they are neglected, the difficulty and indisposition are increasing every month. The mind is receding degree after degree from the warm and hopeful zone, till at last it will enter the arctic circle, and become fixed in relentless and eternal ice."

V. **Will one day receive a rude and painful awakening.** "When this cometh to pass (lo, it will come), then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them" (ver 33). The threatened judgment fell on Israel, and, when it was too late, they saw the value of the opportunities they had despised. Those who do not know the preciousness of their privileges by using them aright shall hereafter be made to know by being deprived of those privileges for ever. It is the wail of many that they did not know the value of their blessings until they were lost.

LESSONS.—1. *The lowest depth of unbelief is not reached without many faithful warnings.* 2. *Unbelief is subtle and deadly in its progress.* 3. *The cure of unbelief is a merciful act of God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 21. Bad News—1. Always travels fast. 2. Its lesson should be seriously pondered. 3. Is disregarded only by the infatuated.

Ver. 22. "The opened mouth of a servant of God is his frankness; the contrary is trimming and flattery; and it is also distinguished from sarcastic witticisms, evil speaking, and insult. The servants of God should be frank in speech, yet not like insolent fellows who believe they may say everything because no one can contradict them, at least when in the pulpit."—*Luther.*

Vers. 23–29. "The new discourse here first takes up again the former threatening and meets those who, still giving themselves up to illusions, thought that the judgment would not inexorably run its course. But before the seed of Divine hope could be sown, the last thorns and thistles of false human hopes, and of the efforts that grew out of them, had to be destroyed, which even now, although against all appearances, were convulsively grasped by those who avoided the passage through the strait gate of repentance which is the condition of participating in the Divine hope, and did not wish to put off the spotted garment of the flesh."—*Hengstenberg.*

Vers. 24–29. The Inheritance of

the Wicked — 1. *A desolate waste.* "They inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel" (ver. 24). 2. *Yet held with a dogged pertinacity.* "We are many: the land is given us for inheritance" (ver. 24). 3. *The scene of unrestrained riot and wickedness.* "Ye shed blood: ye work abomination" (vers. 25, 26). 4. *Defies the most desperate efforts to retain it.* "The sword, devouring beasts, the pestilence," are beyond their power to vanquish (ver. 27). 5. *Is finally swept by the desolating vengeance of outraged justice.* "I will lay the land most desolate—because of their abominations" (vers. 28, 29).

— "Such was the infatuation of the escaped remnant in the now wasted lands of Judea that they were even still full of self-sufficient confidence. Had this confidence been resting on the restoration of God's favour through their repentance, it would have been a reasonable confidence; but it rested on utterly false reasonings as to the relation in which they stood to Abraham. Abraham, they reasoned, obtained from God the inheritance of Canaan, and we are his children, and therefore are entitled to succeed to his inheritance. Abraham was but *one* when he obtained the grant of the land; much more shall we retain it as our own who are *many*. But they utterly shut their eyes to the fact that Abraham pleased God in all his ways, and was therefore called the friend of God; they, on the contrary, displeased God in all their ways by 'working abominations' and 'standing upon their sword,' as if might made right."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 24. "Strange infatuation! That when the sign of God's displeasure had been so strikingly displayed against them for their sins, scattering all their vain confidence to the wind, they should still, without abandoning those sins, hope for the peculiar tokens of the Divine favour! Yet in a more subtle and refined form we find the same flagrant inconsistence practised by the Jews of our Lord's time who, in like manner, reckoned with confidence on being children of Abraham, as if that alone were enough to secure them in all covenant blessings, while He charged them with being in spirit children of the devil, and consequently entitled only to look for the portion of the lost (John viii. 33–44)."—*Fairbairn.*

— "Walls, cities, go to ruin, but a fool will still plant himself on the ruins (Prov. xxvii. 22). When the mask falls from the hypocrite, then will the beast of prey which lay behind become manifest; and we shall all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ: then the masquerade will be out."—*Lange.*

Ver. 27. "The Divine vengeance does not need to rush upon its victim from behind in order to lay hold of him, nor does it require to make a long and laborious search after him; but where he has fled to and fancies himself hidden, whether it be in the heights or in the depths, there the vengeance of God lies in readiness, and has been expecting him to come to it. In the end we all come to God. Alas that so few should fall into His arms, while so many fall upon His sword! If the wild beasts of passion do not tear a man, the pestilence of his natural corruption will gradually consume him."—*Ibid.*

Vers. 27–29. "The small remnant in Judea being so far from righteousness, the prophet could only speak to them as a minister of condemnation. What they had to expect was only judgment still more severe and exterminating than what had yet been appointed. For them the desolations of the land must become still more desolate, and new horrors be inflicted by the sword, the pestilence, and the wild beast. All must be reduced to a howling wilderness, as it really was, that the new hope for Israel might spring from another and better root, and that the people might know how impossible it was to attain to blessing from God without first separating from sin."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 28. "Desolate shall it be at last about every ungodly man; for as the heart is, so is the life. First of all sin desolates, then come desolations through death; finally, we pass into the desolation of an eternity without God."—*Lange.*

Ver. 29. See chap xxx. 19.

— Those are intractable and unteachable indeed that are not made to know their dependence upon God when all their creature-comforts fail them and they are made desolate.

Ver. 30–33. **The Preacher's Critics** —1. *Use every opportunity in public and private to hold him up to ridicule.* "Thy people still are talking against thee by the walls, and in the doors of the houses" (ver. 30). 2. *Are eager to give their own garbled version of his message.* "Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord" (ver. 30). 3. *Observe the outward decorum of worship.* "They sit before thee as My people, and hear thy words" (ver. 31). 4. *Show a fondness for the word which the state of their hearts contradicts.* "With their mouth they show much love; but their heart goeth after their covetousness" (ver. 31). 5. *Are charmed with the music of eloquence.* "Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument" (ver. 32). 6. *Listen not for profit, but to pick up material for scornful gossip.* "They hear thy words, but they do them not" (ver. 32). 7. *Only when calamity comes do they learn the value of what they despised.* "When this cometh to pass shall they know that a prophet hath been among them" (ver. 33).

— "In making use of human agents to reveal His will to men, the Lord teaches us to look for no external perfection. There may be found all the diversities of manner and nearly all the imperfections which distinguish ordinary speakers, for the Spirit, even in His highest operations, must still leave free-play to native peculiarities of thought and utterance. But in regard to its substance God's Word is perfect, and stands nobly apart from all that is of man. Let it ever be ours, therefore, to hear it with reverence and bow to its requirements with child-like submission. It is we who must fall in with its terms, not it that must accommodate itself to ours."—*Fairbairn.*

—"The Word of God is a very serious matter. Let every one take heed how he hears, that he be not a hearer only, but a doer. What the prophet announces comes to pass, and if the fulfilment takes place the mere hearer will be the loser; he is overtaken by the threatened punishments and excluded from the promised blessings. He has not to deal with an excellent orator; but behind the Son of man stands the Lord, mighty to punish and to save."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 30. "Public persons are a common subject of discourse. Every one takes liberty to censure them at pleasure, and faithful ministers know not how much ill is said of them every day. But God takes notice, not only of what is decreed against them, or sworn against them, or written against them, or spoken with solemnity and deliberation, but of what is said against them in common talk, and He will reckon for it. His prophets shall not always be made the song of the drunkards."—*M. Henry.*

Ver. 31. "Merely to hear without doing makes all preaching unprofitable. Strange that sermons of rebuke should be more attractive than grace-sermons. Men would rather be smitten than caressed. They think, perhaps, that in the love there is too much of design. If one has been struck by the cudgel, it is still possible to preserve one's heart and head; but love leaves nothing to one's self, it demands all—the whole man and the whole life."—*Lange.*

— "Their heart is on their halfpenny, we say; neither can the loadstone of God's Word hale them one jot from the earth. As serpents have

their bodies in the water, their heads out of the water, so here: as those Gergesites, they mind a swine-sty more than a sanctuary."—*Trapp.*

— "With all their loud mouth-professions of love to God and His ordinances, the love which reigns in their heart is love of self, of fame, pleasure, and gain. Covetousness is a grand rival to the love of God, so that where the love of Mammon is, there the love of God is not."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 32. "Mere habit as regards the hearing of sermons makes people indifferent, and at last stupid. Pious sentimentalism is spiritual adultery. Satan goes with us into church. Edification and the capacity for it are two different things."—*Lange.*

Ver. 33. "A true prophet will always leave beind him the impression of a true prophet."

The Reproof of the False Shepherds and a Promise of the Good and True Shepherd. (Chap. xxxiv.)

EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Prophesy against the shepherds.**" "The trouble which the prophet here encounters arises from the loss of civil government. The seeming loss, he contends, is a real gain, as the present government was so bad."—*Hengstenberg. Keil* designates the turning against the bad shepherds as a foil for the ensuing promise.

Ver. 2. "**Woe to the shepherds.**" The rulers who sought in their government their own selfish ends, not the good of the people ruled. *Kliefoth* understands the entire body of officials who had committed to them the leadership of the people. The office, like that of a shepherd for his flock, is to guard and provide for his people.

Ver. 3. "**Ye eat the fat, and clothe you with the wool.**" Refers to the draining of the subjects. The rulers levied exorbitant tributes. "**Ye kill them that are fed**"—the culminating act denoting the murder of the subjects in order to seize on their goods.

Ver. 4. "**That which was driven away.**" "When Israel was not held together in the name of Jehovah through the theocratic offices, the scattering, the self-abandonment and surrender to the worldly powers was the natural necessary consequence."—*Lange.* "**With force and cruelty have ye ruled them.**" As the Egyptians once did to the Israelites (Exod. i. 13, 14)—the native shepherds are no better than the heathen despots were in the olden time (comp. Lev. xxv. 43).

Ver. 5. "**Because there was no shepherd**"—none worthy of the name, though there were some called shepherds (1 Kings xxii. 17; Matt. ix. 36). "**Became meat to the beasts of the field**"—the heathen nations, the wild stock. They became a prey to the Syrians, Ammon, Moab, and Assyria.

Ver. 6. "**My sheep—My flock.**" The repeated and emphasised "*My* flock" prepares for the resolutions of Jehovah that follow. "**None did search or seek after them**"—rather *seek* or *search*. "The former is the part of the superior rulers to enquire after; to search out is the duty of the subordinate rulers."—*Junius.*

Ver. 10. "**I am against the shepherds, and require My flock at their hand.**" God had already begun to do so, having punished Zedekiah with the deprivation of eyesight, after having first caused his sons to be killed and then the other princes to be slain (Jer. lii. 10)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 11. "**Behold I, even I.**" This found its most glorious fulfilment in the appearance of Christ, as vers. 23, 24 expressly announce that God will

execute His pastoral office specially by the Messiah. Yet, even before the appearance of Christ the pastoral care of God was active in the restoration from the exile and the other gracious gifts and benefits, which, however, all point forward to the true fulfilment and call forth the desire for it."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 12. "**The cloudy and dark day**"—the dark, afflictive time of the people of God, when dispersed by the heathen.

Ver. 14. "**I will feed them—upon the high mountains of Israel**"—in chaps. xvii. 23, xx. 40, the phrase is, "the mountain of the height of Israel," in the singular number. "The reason of the differences is, there Ezekiel spoke of the central seat of the kingdom, where the people met for the worship of Jehovah, Mount Zion; here he speaks of the kingdom of Israel at large, all the parts of which are regarded as possessing a moral elevation."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 16. "**I will feed them with judgment**"—justice and equity, in contrast with the cruel rigour of the unfaithful rulers.

Ver. 17. "**I judge between cattle and cattle.**" "The officials are with ver. 10 discharged and gone: the persons concerned can only come into consideration according to their personal qualities, not according to their official rank. I judge between one class of citizens and another, so as to award what is right to each."—*Lange, &c.*

Ver. 18. "**Ye must foul the residue with your feet.**" Not content with appropriating to their own use the good of others, they, from mere wantonness, spoiled what they did not use, so as to be of no use to the owners. *Grotius* explains the image as referring to the usuries with which the rich ground the poor (chap. xxii. 12; Isa. xxiv. 2).

Ver. 22. "**Therefore will I save My flock, and they shall be no more a prey.**" "After the restoration from Babylon the Jews were delivered in some degree from the oppression, not only of foreigners, but also of their own great people, who had oppressed with bondage arising out of debts and mortgages (Neh. v. 1–19). The full and final fulfilment of this prophecy is future."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 23. "**I will set up one Shepherd**"—"the complex embodiment of shepherd watchfulness, as of all the duties of the shepherd office—the Divine realisation of the idea of all that is involved generally in the nature of the office, as service towards the community for the sake of God, as sacred service in behalf of God's people."—*Lange.* "With the unity is connected the glory of the king and his kingdom, as the decline was connected with the multiplicity of the shepherds. With the coming of that great Shepherd ceases not only the division of Israel, but also the separation between Israel and the heathen."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 24. "**My servant David a prince**"—"the true David, the Messiah, in whom the stem of David is to culminate. Not a resurrection of David, but a sending of a David who has not yet been present."—*Hengstenberg.* The fittest person to wield the world-sceptre abused by all the world-kings (Dan. ii. 34, 35, 44, 45).

Ver. 25. "**I will make a covenant of peace**"—"a security against hostile powers, of which the 'ceasing of evil beasts' symbolises the negative and the 'dwelling safely' the positive side. Through Christ the people of God are predominant. The heathen world is forced from the dominant place which it had hitherto taken and sinks to the servile."—*Hengstenberg, &c.*

Ver. 26. "**Showers of blessing.**" "The Holy Spirit's reviving influences are often compared to a refreshing shower (Isa. xliv. 3). The literal fulfilment is, however, the primary one, though the spiritual also is designed. In cor-

correspondence with the settled reign of righteousness internally, all is to be prosperity externally, fertilising showers (according to the promise of the ancient covenant, Lev. xxvi. 4; Ps. lxviii. 9; Mal. iii. 10) and productive trees and lands."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 29. "**I will raise up for them a plant of renown.**" According to the old style of exposition—Messiah, the Rod, Branch, the Righteous Branch (Isa. xi. 1; Jer. xxxiii. 5), who shall obtain for them renown. *Hengstenberg, Fairbairn,* and *Geikie* translate—"a plantation for a name;" the soil which is planted will be famous for its yield, through the showers of blessing (ver. 26). By reason of this fertility Israel shall be renowned among the heathen as the people blessed of the Lord.

Ver. 31. "**And ye My flock are men.**" "What grace when the God of heaven condescends to men who are taken from the earth and return to it! Ps. viii.; xxxvi. 8)."—*Hengstenberg.* "There is evidently an emphasis on *men.* Men are ye; remember your place, you are merely human; but remember at the same time that I am your God: so that without Me nothing, but with Me all."—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS.

A Grave Impeachment of Unfaithful Rulers

(Vers. 1–10.)

I. They abused their authority in ministering to their own selfish indulgence and personal aggrandisement. "The shepherds feed themselves Ye eat the fat and clothe you with the wool" (vers. 2, 3). The ruler is raised to a lofty dignity and endowed with special resources in order to watch over and protect the interests of his people. The wants and even the luxuries of life are secured to him that he may be free to devote his powers to the general good. He is keenly alive to any act of treachery on the part of his people; but he is none the less treacherous when he abuses his high trust in seeking only his own advantage. He has basely abdicated the highest functions of his kinghood:—

> "He's a king,
> A true, right king, that dare do aught save wrong;
> Fears nothing mortal but to be unjust:
> Who is not blown up with the flattering puffs
> Of spongy sycophants; who stands unmoved,
> Despite the jostling of opinion."—*Marston.*

II. They neglected the plainest duties of their office. 1. *They made no provision for the immediate wants of the people.* "Ye feed not the flock" (ver. 3). The first demand of nature is food: where this is denied to a people the result is riot or starvation. The ruler who is ignorant how to procure food for his people is incompetent; if he makes no effort to do so he is indolent; if he is indifferent about it he is cruel. The king should be a father to his people, providing for, watching over, and protecting them. 2. *They had no sympathy with the afflicted and unfortunate.* "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken" (ver. 4). It is a severe strain on the loyalty of a people when their sufferings win no pity from their selfish ruler. It is a blot on the brilliant reign of Queen Elizabeth that the brave seamen who defeated the Spanish Armada were left to rot in their ships or die in the streets of the naval ports because there were no hospitals to receive the wounded. "It would grieve any man's heart," wrote Lord Howard, the High Admiral of that day, "to

see men that have served so valiantly die so miserably." Modern hospitals and infirmaries are the practical outcome of an enlightened Christian philanthropy. 3. *They made no effort to restore the disaffected and the wandering.* "Neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost" (ver. 4). The monarch who is indifferent to the emigration and social discontent of his people helps to weaken the stability of his kingdom. Wealth is unsafe in the midst of rebellious poverty:—

> "Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
> Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

The formal declaration of William II., Kaiser of Germany, in favour of the International Regulation of Labour, is one of the most remarkable events, proceeding direct from imperial authority, of modern times. The oppressed of one country have enriched other countries to which they fled in their despair. 4. *They retained the name of an office which their conduct had robbed of all practical meaning.* "Because there is no shepherd" (vers. 5, 8). They professed to be shepherds—vigilant, faithful, kind; but they were unworthy of the name. They were frauds. The flock was worse off than if it had no shepherd. Better no shepherd than such shepherds. An honourable man would relinquish an office the duties of which he was incompetent or unwilling to fulfil.

III. Their rule was one of tyranny and violence. "With force and cruelty have ye ruled them, and they were scattered" (vers. 4, 5). It was a cruel irony of the shepherd-character to deal in blows instead of food, and instead of tending with care to scatter with terror: the shepherd-garb disguised the fangs and savagery of the wolf. "It is ill with the patient when his physician is his worst disease." It is the highest injustice when the ruler uses his great power to oppress and destroy his people.

IV. They shall be divested of the office they had degraded and called to account for their misdeeds. "I am against the shepherds, and will require My flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more" (ver. 10). Tyranny and wrong cannot last for ever: the reckoning-day comes on apace. In all wickedness there is weakness that will soon or later be fatal to its reign. It is related of Lord Ampthill, British Ambassador to the Court of Berlin, that during his mission in Rome he possessed a huge boa-constrictor, and interested himself in watching its habits. One day the monster escaped from the box where he supposed it was asleep, quietly wound itself around his body, and began gradually to tighten its folds. His position became extremely perilous; but the consummate coolness and self-possession which had enabled him to win many a diplomatic triumph befriended him in this dangerous emergency. He remembered there was a bone in the throat of the serpent which, if he could find and break, he would save himself. He was aware that either he or the snake must perish. Not a moment must be lost in hesitation. He deliberately seized the head of the serpent, thrust his hand down its throat and snapped the vital bone. The coils were relaxed, the victim fell at his feet, and he was free. So one day the weak place in wrong-doing is sure to be smitten and it must succumb. Over the head of every tyrant there hangs the sword of retributive justice.

LESSONS.—1. *Treachery in government means suffering among the people.* 2. *A just ruler is above the vice of corruption.* 3. *The highest office cannot protect the wrong-doer from ultimate exposure and disgrace.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1, 2. "Corruption in the upper, the governing classes, those who give the tone and measure to society, carries along with it corruption among the whole people, and that not merely for a time, but for ever.—It is a very honourable title to be called a shepherd, but to be so is a heavy burden, with much trouble, care, and labour." —*Lange.*

Vers. 2–23. "The removal of false rulers who have ruled for their own selfish aggrandisement, not for the glory of God or the real good of their subjects, is to precede the setting-up of the coming King, who is to rule in love and righteousness, Messiah the Good Shepherd. The Lord Jesus Christ provides for the eternal well-being of His own flock, both the elect remnant of the literal Israel and also the spiritual Israel, the Church, infinitely better than the best of earthly shepherds ever cared for his sheep. But the false shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel's days cared only for themselves and for their own grovelling aims, selfish gain, and worldly pre-eminence, like Diotrephes in ages long subsequent (3 John 9)."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 2–10. A Bad Shepherd—1. Is selfish (ver. 2). 2. Avaricious (ver. 3). 3. Heartless (ver. 4). 4. Cruel (ver. 4). 5. A terror to the flock (vers. 5, 6). 6. Shall not escape punishment (vers. 7–10).

Ver. 2. "Good shepherds they should have been, but they were naught (Jer. xxiii.), and naught would come of them for their maladministration. The sheep will follow the shepherd. The common people are like a flock of cranes —as the first fly, all follow."—*Trapp.*

— "There is a woe to those who are in public trusts, but consult only their own private interests, and are more inquisitive about the benefice than about the office, what money is to be got than what good is to be done. It is an old complaint, all seek their own, and too many more than their own."—*M. Henry.*

Ver. 3. "Ye eat the fat." "This ye might do, if in measure, for the workman is worthy of his wages (1 Cor. ix. 7), but ye gorge yourselves with the best of the best. If the belly may be filled, the back fitted, that is all you take care for."—*Trapp.*

— "Ye kill them." "Contrive methods for a seeming legal course to forfeit first the life, and next the estate of the well-fed, rich, and wealthy, and then make merry and feast as voluptuous, unfaithful shepherds feast on the fattest of the sheep in their masters' fold."—*Pool.*

— "The priests ate the tithes, the first-fruits and the offerings of the people; the princes received the tributes and imposts; and instead of instructing and protecting them, the latter took away their lives by the cruelties they practised against them; the former destroyed their souls by the poison of their doctrine and by their bad example. The fat sheep point out the rich, to whom these pastors often disguised the truth by a cruel condescension and complaisance."—*Calmet.*

Vers. 4–6. The Disastrous Effects of Sin. 1. Disease and suffering (ver. 4). 2. Enslavement and oppression (ver. 4). 3. Estrangement and dispersion (vers. 5, 6). 4. Abandonment to ruin (ver. 5).

Ver. 4. "A timely spiritual reformation of the state by its rulers would have averted the judgments of God altogether, and even in Ezekiel's time, when wrath from God had already descended, faithful conduct on their part would have been followed by a mitigation of this punishment and a restoration of the scattered exiles."—*Fausset.*

— The obligations of the shepherd

office a mirror of human wretchedness.

— "No person is fit for the office of a shepherd who does not well understand the diseases to which sheep are incident and the mode of cure. And is any man fit for the pastoral office, to be a shepherd of souls, who is not well acquainted with the disease of sin in all its varieties, and the remedy for this disease and the proper mode of administering it in those various cases? He who does not know Jesus Christ as his own Saviour never can recommend Him to others. He who is not saved will not save."—*A. Clarke.*

Ver. 5. "Not merely in the bodily but pre-eminently in the spiritual enemies of the people of God inheres the wolf-spirit, the devil."—*Schmieder.*

Ver. 6. **The Qualifications of the True Shepherd.** "1. He knows the disease of sin and its consequences, for the Eternal Spirit, by whom he is called, has convinced him of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. 2. He knows well the great remedy for this disease, the passion and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ. 3. He is skilful and knows how to apply this remedy. (1.) The healthy and sound he knows how to keep in health, and cause them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. (2.) Those in a state of convalescence he knows how to cherish, feed, and care for, that they may be brought into a state of spiritual soundness. (3.) Those still under the whole power of the general disease, how to reprove, instruct, and awaken. (4.) Those dying in a state of spiritual weakness, how to find out and remove the cause. (5.) Those fallen into sin and sorely bruised and broken in their souls by that fall, how to restore. (6.) Those driven away by temptation and cruel usage, how to find out and turn aside the temptation and cruel usage. (7.) Those who have wandered from the flock, got into strange pastures, and are perverted by erroneous doctrines, how to seek and bring them back to the fold. (8.) Those among whom the wolf has got and scattered the flock, how to oppose, confound, and expel the wolf. He knows how to preach, explain, and defend the truth. He is well acquainted with the weapons he has to use, and the spirit in which he has to employ them. In a word, the true shepherd gives up his life to the sheep, in their defence, and in labouring for their welfare. And while he is thus employed, it is the duty of the flock to feed and clothe him, and see that neither he nor his family lack the necessaries and conveniences of life."—*A. Clarke.*

Vers. 7–10. **The Divine Judgment on Unfaithful Ministers**—1. *Is preceded by a clearly detailed indictment of offences* (ver. 8). 2. *Is the expression of the righteous indignation of God against wrong-doing.* "I am against the shepherds" (ver. 10.) 3. *Demands a strict account of the trust so grossly violated.* "I will require My flock at their hand" (ver. 10). 4. *Deprives the offenders of all their power and emoluments.* "I will cause them to cease from feeding the flock, neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more" (ver. 10). 5. *Is mingled with tender sympathy for those who have suffered from neglect and oppression.* "I will deliver My flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them" (ver. 10).

— "The frightful judgment which is contained even in the beautiful name of the Shepherd."—*Lange.*

Ver. 8. "God here seemeth to be in a great heat, in a perturbation of spirit, causing a kind of impediment in His speech—'As I live: surely because'—so thoroughly was He moved against these lewd shepherds, whose faults He rippeth up again to make better way to their sentence."—*Trapp.*

God's Care over His People.

(Vers. 11–31.)

The unfaithful shepherds, who have occupied so prominent a place in the prophet's vision, now sink into the background. They have been arraigned, and judgment passed upon them. They are disposed of. And now, by one of those skilful dramatic changes so characteristic of the genius of Ezekiel, the space out of which the delinquents have vanished is filled with the presence of Jehovah, and, while we gaze, shade after shade of the Divine character is artistically developed with inimitable delicacy of touch, until we are enraptured with a picture of the unutterable tenderness and majesty of the God of Israel. The prophecy is full of consolation to the stricken nation, and is intended to inspire hope in the breasts of the disconsolate exiles. It is a sublime and graphic description of *God's care over His people*, as we shall see in the following analysis.

I. **He will gather together the dispersed.** 1. *He will seek for them with tender solicitude* (vers. 11–13). In contrast with the heartless rapacity of the rulers, who robbed and scattered His people, Jehovah will show that His concern for their welfare springs from unselfish though unrequited love. He seeks not His own advantage, but theirs. As the anxious shepherd plods over fell and moorland, through stony valleys and thorny brakes, in search of his wandering sheep, so the Lord will penetrate into all places where His affrighted people have sought temporary shelter "in the cloudy and dark day." The loving heart is reckless of toil and undismayed by the most formidable difficulties. 2. *He will make ample provision for their needs* (vers. 14–16). He finds them famished, dispirited, wounded; but He "will feed them in a good pasture, will bind up that which is broken, and strengthen that which is sick." Though His providence has been abused and His counsel disregarded, their sufferings move His pity and their wants evoke His benevolence. Even our sins cannot stem the perennial outflow of the Divine goodness. But how inveterate and aggravated is sin committed in the presence of such unceasing kindness! 3. *He will provide for them a place of safety.* "There shall they lie in a good fold" (ver. 14). Defended from the harassing exactions of false shepherds, and from the ravages of wolfish enemies, they shall forget the weariness and fear of their long, tedious wanderings in the restfulness and security with which they are now enfolded. It is not enough for God to seek and find the lost; His purpose is not accomplished until they are safely sheltered within the arms of His omnipotent love.

II. **He will deal with them according to individual merit** (vers. 17–22). Even Divine love is strictly discriminative. Its affluence embraces all, but its personal realisation is regulated by the moral condition of the recipient. Love that is not governed by wisdom and justice loses strength and sanctity. "I judge between cattle and cattle"—between men and men. God has an infallible insight into character, and marks shades of distinction imperceptible to us. He sees elements of good where our purblind sense sees nothing but evil, and detects the presence of sin underneath the fairest show of virtue. He knows how to encourage the weak and timid, and how to restrain the strong and forward. He knows how to succour the oppressed, and to mete out justice to the oppressor. It is better to fall into the hands of God than be at the mercy of the most impartial earthly judge.

III. **He will provide for them THE Good Shepherd.** 1. *A Ruler of singular and peerless worth.* The One Shepherd, the Shepherd-King, as was David, His antitype (ver. 23). Their many shepherds had been unfaithful, avaricious, heartless, cruel. They had oppressed and scattered the flock. The One Good Shepherd would be beyond the reach of corruption or intimidation. He will rule in equity. He will gently lead and bravely defend His people. He will sacrifice His life for the sheep. Others had destroyed: He will save. 2. *The rule of the Good Shepherd will bring them into closer personal relationship to God.* "I the Lord will be their God" (ver. 24). The tyranny of the false shepherds had driven the people from God, and fostered in their distracted minds doubts as to His righteousness and goodness. But under the gracious regimen of the Good Shepherd all this will be changed. They shall learn that the covenant promise is unrevoked—Jehovah is still their God. The government of the Divine Prince is not merely legal and social, but intensely and supremely spiritual. It is the rule of God, for God, and leading to God. Such rule may be slow and gradual in its development, but it is ever bringing us nearer to God, and revealing His purposes and character.

> "God's plans, like lilies pure and white, unfold;
> We must not tear the close, short leaves apart.
> Time will reveal the calyxes of gold."

IV. **He will endow them with unprecedented blessings.** 1. *Peace* (ver. 25). 2. *Prosperity* (vers. 26, 27). 3. *Safety* (vers. 25, 28). 4. *Imperishable renown* (ver. 29). 5. *Union with the Divine* (vers. 30, 31).

LESSONS.—The Divine care. 1. *A source of comfort to the afflicted.* 2. *Of hope to the penitent.* 3. *Of strength and hope to the diligent.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 11–31. "The description throughout is of an ideal kind. The prophet foretells simply the nature of the coming future under the form of the old landmarks and well-known relations. The best of the past shall revive again; more than revive, it shall appear free from the defects that formerly intermingled with it, clothed with a perfection and completeness hitherto unknown. But while the substance should thus coincide in the new and the old, it is not obscurely intimated that the shell would materially differ; for certainly the literal David should not be the Prince in whom the promise was to stand, but One unspeakably greater than he. When the promised Shepherd was found to be the glorious and mighty Lord, to whom, as David in the spirit foresaw, the heritage, not of Canaan, but of all lands and all nations belonged, it behoved the Jews to conclude that all the rest must receive a corresponding enlargement; the region, the people, the inheritance of blessing, must severally be what the old but represented and typified. What Canaan would have been with its David restored again, and all its covenant blessings enjoyed in richest profusion, such, in the new and higher sphere of the Messiah's Kingdom, shall the whole domain be over which He is the Lord, when this promise of good things to come attains to its full and final accomplishment. We see the word beginning to take effect, even before Messiah came, in the partial re-establishment of the Divine Kingdom within the ancient bounds, and, as far as was needed, for the higher purposes of the Kingdom. We see it advancing afterwards towards its riper fulfilment, when the great object of the prediction came and did the part of the Good Shepherd by avenging for

ever the cause of His elect and laying the sure foundation of His everlasting inheritance. And we see it travelling on to its full and destined realisation in every conquest made by the truth of God over the darkness and corruption of the world."—*Fairbairn.*

Vers. 11–16. The Divine solicitude. Seen — 1. In active endeavours to restore the wandering (vers. 11–13, 16). 2. In bountifully supplying the wants of the people (vers. 13–15). 3. In affording security and rest (vers. 14, 15). 4. In the sympathetic treatment of the terrified and afflicted (ver. 16).

Ver. 11. "Rather than the work shall be undone, I will do it myself, and then it is sure to be well done. Aristotle tells of a certain Persian who, being asked, 'What did most of all feed the horse?' answered, 'The master's eye;' and of a certain African who, when it was demanded, 'What was the best manure or soil for a field?' answered 'The owner's footsteps'—that is, his presence and perambulation. Shepherds should reside with their flocks; the Arch-shepherd will not fail to do so."—*Trapp.*

— "Though magistrates and ministers fail in doing their part for the good of the Church, God will not fail in doing His. He will take the flock into His own hand rather than the Church shall come short of any kindness He has designed for it. The under-shepherd may prove careless, but the Chief Shepherd neither slumbers nor sleeps. They may be false, but God abides faithful."—*M. Henry.*

Ver. 12. "When things are at the worst God himself will set in: He reserveth His holy hand for a dead lift."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 13. "This prophecy primarily respected their restoration from captivity in Babylon, and was in part at least fulfilled when so many thousands of them returned to their own land under the conduct of Zerrubabel, Ezra, and others. It seems, however, to look still further, even to the general restoration of the whole Jewish nation from their present wide dispersion over the whole world, which restoration most of the prophets foretell shall be effected in the latter days. But there is no need to confine this promise wholly to the Jews. When those in any age or nation that have gone astray from God are brought back by repentance; when those that erred come to the acknowledgment of the truth; when God's outcasts are gathered and restored, and religious assemblies that were dispersed are again collected and united upon the ceasing of persecution; and when the Churches have rest and liberty, then this prediction has a true accomplishment."—*Benson.*

Ver. 13. "The Divine refreshments, images of the spiritual here, of the eternal hereafter."—*Lange.*

Ver. 15. "Food and rest, the two great necessities of human life. Their rest will nourish them, and their nourishment will bring them new rest. Rest—true, eternal repose, is only to be had under the shepherd-staff of Christ."—*Lange.*

Vers. 16–22. The Divine justice. 1. Will punish the wanton abuse of prosperity (ver. 16). 2. Will discriminate between the rich and poor, the strong and weak, the oppressor and oppressed (vers. 17–22). 3. Will deliver the abused captives (vers. 21, 22).

Ver. 16. **The Lord's inspection of the flock at the same time a call to self-examination.**

— "The Lord feeds with judgment, that is, with befitting difference, since He dispenses to each what is proper to him. He performs to the weak no more than is good for them. The children he feeds with milk, and defends them. He acts mildly or severely, consoles, frightens, blames, caresses, as at any time is good for us. For the

fearful He relaxes the reins, and those who place their confidence in Him He draws to Himself. If some are fat and corrupt the weak, He takes from their strength. Some are proud of the gifts lent to them, and despise the simplicity of others; for these it is good when they are humbled and are deprived of their gifts, so that they may obtain the salvation of Christ. Thus He accomplishes the judgment and the separation between sheep and sheep; and so each one should be concerned about himself, and not trouble himself respecting others. The separation is already going on here in secret, but at last it will become manifest and be seen to issue in a wide gulf. A stern judge is the Good Shepherd. Not merely the unscrupulous leaders of the flock, but even the sheep themselves, will be brought to account by Him." —*Lange.*

Ver. 17. "'I judge between cattle and cattle.' Between false and true professors, between them that have only the form and them that have the power of godliness, between the backslider in heart and the upright man." —*A. Clarke.*

Ver. 18. "Ye abuse God's mercies, you consume much upon yourselves, and ye spoil more on which the poor would have been glad to feed. There are some who would rather give food to their sporting dogs than to the poor around them who are ready to starve, and would be glad of the crumbs that fall from the table of those masters." —*A. Clarke.*

— "Would our so-called men of culture also but consider it, who only tread under foot the pure doctrine, or trouble it by their goat-like gambols." —*Lange.*

Ver. 21. "The mischievous polemic in the Church. A theology that is quarrelsome and combative scatters the Churches in the world."—*Lange.*

Vers. 23–31. **The Good Shepherd.** 1. The Divine Prince (ver. 23). 2. Shall ensure peace, safety, prosperity, and victory (vers. 25–28). Shall become pre-eminent in dignity and greatness by what He does for His people (vers. 29, 30). 4. Shall exalt His people into a Divinely-ennobled manhood (ver. 31).

Vers. 23, 24. "The One Shepherd, according to the promise in its fulfilment: 1. His official position through all times. 2. His shepherd-service in the flesh and in the spirit. 3. His personality in respect to God and as regards the flock."—*Lange.*

Ver. 23. "Who indeed is the only Shepherd. Magistrates and ministers are shepherds; but Christ is the Good Shepherd (Jno. x. 11); the Great Shepherd and Bishop of Souls (1 Peter ii. 25; Heb. xiii. 20); the True Shepherd above all for skill, love, and power, above Jacob, above David, of whom He is descended, and by whose name He is here called (Jer. xxx. 9; Hosea iii. 5; Ezek. xxxvii. 24)."—*Trapp.*

— "Messiah, the True Shepherd, who hath given Himself this name both in the Prophets and in the Gospel, and who hath perfectly fulfilled all the duties, the characters whereof have been before described. He is called David because He sprung from David according to the flesh, because He possessed eminently and really all those qualities which the Scriptures give to David as the type of the Messiah, and because He was the person in whom all the promises made to David were fulfilled. Though this prophecy was in a great measure completed when Christ by the preaching of the Gospel gathered into one the children of God, among whom were many of the lost sheep of Israel, yet it will receive a further completion at the general conversion of the Jews."—*Calmet.*

— "David. 1. As to the name, His beloved (Matt. iii. 17). 2. As to His birth in Bethlehem. 3. As to His humble state and littleness (Isa. liii. 3). 4. As to His shepherd-service. 5. As

to His anointing. 6. As to His devotedness: David for the law, Christ for the flock. 7. As to His victories."—*Starke.*

— "David, king of Israel, had been dead upwards of 400 years, and from that time till now there never was a ruler of any kind, either in the Jewish Church or state, of the name of David. This then must be some typical person, and from the texts marked in the margin we understand that Jesus Christ alone is meant, as both Old and New Testaments agree in this. And from this one Shepherd all Christian ministers must derive their authority to teach and their grace to teach effectually."—*A. Clarke.* The ancient Jews allowed that the Messiah was meant in this place.

Ver. 24. "This is that beehive of heavenly honey we so oft meet with in the Old Testament, which therefore the sectaries have so little reason to reject."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 25. "'I will make with them a covenant of peace'—I will cut with them the peace covenant; a covenant sacrifice, procuring and establishing peace between God and man; and between man and his fellows. The cutting refers to the ancient mode of making covenants. The blood was poured out, the animal was divided from mouth to tail, exactly in two, the divisions placed opposite to each other, the contracting parties entered into the space, going in at each end, and met in the middle, and there took the covenant oath. He is the Prince of Peace, and through Him come glory to God in the highest, and peace and good-will to men upon earth."—*A. Clarke.*

— "The evil beasts in the land—spiritual false guides, worldly persecutors, plausible hypocrites."—*Lange.*

Ver. 26. **The Church a source of blessing.** 1. *As it is the dwelling-place of God.* "My hill." 2. *As it is enriched with a plenitude of Divine grace.* "I will cause the shower to come down in his season: there shall be showers of blessing." 3. *As it is faithful and active in diffusing its God-given benefits.* "I will make them and the places round about a blessing."

— There the Church is a blessing where there is the rain of the Holy Spirit. Without this rain nothing grows in the Kingdom of God: one cannot even say Jesus is Lord (1 Cor. xii. 3).

Ver. 28. **Spiritual boldness.** "1. Over against the powers of the world. 2. Over against the wickedness of sin. 3. Over against the transitoriness and uncertainty of our earthly life. 4. Over against the solicitude of our own heart."—*Lange.*

Ver. 29. "'I will raise up a plant of renown'—a plantation to the name: to the name of Christ. The words might be applied to the Christian Church; but that Christ may be called a plant or plantation here—as He is elsewhere called a branch and a rod (Isa. iv. 2; xi. 1; Jer. xxiii. 5; xxxv. 15)—is most probable. He is the person of name—Jesus; who has a name above every name, at whose name every knee shall bow; through whose name, by faith in His name, the diseased are healed; and in whose name all our prayers and supplications must be presented to God. This is the person of **Name!**"—*Clarke.*

— "Christ, the true tree of life. Or the Church, planted and rooted in Christ, and much renowned all the world over. Christ mystical is a vine covering the whole earth."—*Trapp.*

— "The Kingdom of the Anointed a planting, inasmuch as the members of the Kingdom are—1. Sown by the Word. 2. Reared, fostered by the Holy Spirit. 3. Grown in time for eternity, to the honour of God the Father."—*Lange.*

— "Hungering after righteousness as the means and preservative against the eternal hunger and distress on account of sin; hunger against hunger, as the way to everlasting satisfaction."—*Lange.*

Vers. 30, 31. "All these promises be

long also to us, if we be true believers in Christ. Then we can say, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.' When we were wandering on the mountains of error, Jesus sought us and brought us safely into the fold. He feeds us in the green pastures of His ordinances now. He leads us in paths of righteousness, and makes us to lie down at rest, reposing on His love; and will at last bring us to the heavenly land of promise, where we shall hunger no more and thirst no more, and our shame shall be turned into everlasting glory."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 30. "Only by the way do the pilgrims of God doubt; not at the beginning, and at the end not at all. At first they proceed in faith, at last they shall see face to face."—*Lange.*

Ver. 31. "Under the more immediate interpretation of the similitude that men are meant, there is at the same time indicated the universality of grace; that not Israel alone but Adam, humanity, are named as the flock; and the greatness also of the grace is perceptible in this, that Israel is not designated by its honourable name, that which expresses its election of grace, but man, which calls to remembrance dust of the ground, sin, and death."—*Schmieder.*

— "This is a chapter which both magistrates and rulers of the Church ought to meditate upon very seriously. The complaints that God here makes of false shepherds, and the curses He denounces against them, show that it is the duty of pastors, with their utmost diligence, to watch over the sheep with which they are entrusted, and to provide with care and readiness for all their wants, and that if they fail herein they must give a severe account to God for it. This too lays an obligation upon princes and magistrates to govern faithfully and justly the people committed to their trust. What befell the Jews, who for the unfaithfulness of their prophets and magistrates were utterly destroyed, shows that it is the greatest misfortune to a nation to have wicked rulers, and that all who were concerned for the glory of God and the happiness and edification of the Church have great reason to pray to God that He would always raise up to His people faithful and good pastors."—*Osterwald.*

The Utter Ruin of Idumea. (Chap. xxxv.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 2. "Mount Seir"—Idumea, the woody mountain region in the south of that part of Palestine which lies to the east of Jordan from the Dead Sea to the Atlantic Gulf. "Seir" means *shaggy*, alluding to its rugged hills and forests, and originally to Esau, the ancestor of Edom (Gen. xxv. 25; xxvii. 11).

Ver. 3. "I will make thee most desolate"—literally *desolation and desolateness.* "It is only in their national character of foes to God's people that the Edomites are to be utterly destroyed. A remnant of Edom, as of the other heathen, is to be called by the name of God (Amos ix. 12)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 5. "A perpetual hatred"—enmity for ever, an abiding enmity. Edom perpetuated the hereditary hatred derived from Esau against Jacob. "By the force of the sword"—by the hands of the sword, the sword being personified as a devourer whose hands were the instruments of destruction. "In the time their iniquity had an end"—its consummation. "Oppression of brethren calls at once for the exercise of compassion, which is best manifested where no one is innocent. When guilt makes the end, ancient enmity should not be let loose."—*Lange.*

Ver. 6. "Sith thou hast not hated blood"—rather the affirmative, Surely thou dost hate blood. "The preserva-

tion of thy life is what thou art intent on securing. The thought of blood being shed among thee is what thou art putting far from thee as the object of aversion; but God's purposes are contrary to thine, and what thou hatest He will send—blood shall pursue thee."—*Fairbairn.* "The effusion of blood, of thy own blood, shall cleave fast to thy footsteps. The murderer hates the blood which he sheds. If he hates the man with such an energy of hate that he attempts his life, he hates the blood in which is the man's soul."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 7. "**Cut off from it him that passeth.**" There is no going to and fro—no traffic. Hence the desolation of death. A retribution in kind, that she should be cut off herself, even as she stood in the crossway to cut off the Israelites who escaped (Obad. 14).

Ver. 10. "**Whereas the Lord was there.**" "It is not said the Lord is there, but *was* there. For a moment He had withdrawn Himself (chap. xi. 23); but that He was there secures that He will be there, since He has not yet definitely given up His inheritance. Where God is in the midst there Edom cannot possibly gain a footing, though He give over His people even for a long time to the foe."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 11. "**I will do according to thine anger.**" "From the hating come anger and envy, expressing themselves not only in word but also in deed. Jehovah acts according to Edom's doings."—*Lange.*

Ver. 13. "**With your mouth ye have boasted against me.**" Edom implied, if he did not express it, in his taunts against Israel, that God had not sufficient power to protect His people. A type of the spirit of all the foes of God and His people (1 Sam. ii. 3; Rev. xiii. 6).

Ver. 14. "**When the whole earth rejoiceth, I will make thee desolate.**" "The 'whole earth' refers to Judea and the nations that submit themselves to Judea's God. When these rejoice, the foes of God and His people, represented by Edom as a nation, shall be desolate. Things shall be completely reversed: Israel, that now for a time mourns, shall then rejoice, and that for ever. Edom, that now rejoices over fallen Israel, shall then, when elsewhere all is joy, mourn, and for ever (Isa. lxv. 17–19; Matt. v. 4; Luke vi. 25)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 15. "**Mount Seir, and all Idumea, even all of it**"—set in contrast to the inheritance of the house of Israel.

HOMILETICS.

The Enemies of God.

(Vers. 1–15.)

It sounds strange to hear again the voice of denunciation interposed in the midst of prophecies full of consolation and hope. The doom of Edom has been dealt with in chapter xxv., but it is introduced once more in perfect harmony with the immediate design of the prophet, which is to show that the future triumph of Israel will be assured by the utter defeat of her bitterest enemies. Idumea, savagely gloating over the downfall of its hated rival, and eagerly taking possession of the desolated land, had an apparent superiority over Israel. The real advantage was still with the people of God. With them was deposited the seed of Divine blessing, the germ of a glorious future. In Idumea no such germ existed. There was nothing there but inveterate hostility to Jehovah, and no prospect but that of ultimate ruin. "While Israel rose in Christ to

the supremacy of the world, Edom vanished from the face of history—their memorial perished, their envy and cruel hatred were for ever buried among the ruins of the nations." The Edomites represent the heathen world and all who have rebelled against and opposed the truth, and in their destruction we read the ultimate fate of the enemies of God in all ages. Observe—

I. **That the enemies of God are actuated by a spirit of malignant hatred.** "Because thou hast had a perpetual hatred" (ver. 5). The enmity existing between Jacob and Esau from their birth was fostered with increasing aggravation by the descendants of the latter. Immediately after the death of Isaac, Esau settled in Edom, and conquered the rocky territory in the neighbourhood of Mount Seir. From their mountain heights, overlooking the southern border of the Holy Land, the Edomites watched with undisguised envy the growing power of the favoured tribes. Their hatred became more acrid and implacable in every succeeding generation. As the father of Hannibal caused his son, when only nine years of age, to swear at the altar eternal hatred to the Romans, so the sons of Edom were pledged to maintain unceasing hostility to Israel. Time, which mollifies the fiercest passions, only intensified the ever-cherished malice of the Edomites, and they embraced every opportunity to make it manifest. The wild unreasoning hatred of the Edomites is a type of the malignant opposition of the enemies of God. This deplorable condition of mind is an evidence of the demoralising effect of sin. It is not simply a dull, sullen indifference, but an ungovernable, demoniacal passion, horribly real in its activity. Goodness is hated because it is good: God is hated because He is God.

II. **That the enemies of God are infatuated with the fury of their opposition.** 1. *They exult over the disasters of God's people.* "Thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of Israel, because it was desolate" (ver. 15). As Edom watched the advancement of Israel with envy, so it noted the invasion and dismemberment of the kingdom with chuckling satisfaction. When the Israelites were prostrate and groaning under the triumphant Chaldean power, Edom laughed at their misfortunes. There is a laughter that is utterly joyless, harsh, metallic, ringing with scorn and an indescribable contemptuousness. It is the laughter of inveterate hatred—an inhuman guffaw. It is thus that the enemies of God exult over the temporary defeat of His people. 2. *They take a savage delight in helping to make those disasters more complete.* "Thou hast shed the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword in the time of their calamity" (ver. 5). Edom, forgetful of all ties of kinship, sent troops to assist the Chaldeans in the siege of Jerusalem. More cruel than the Chaldeans, they clamoured for the total destruction of the city, and exclaimed with fiendish gesticulations—"Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof" (Ps. cxxxvii. 7). They eagerly took part in plundering the city, they occupied the passes and cut off the retreat of the fugitives who escaped the massacre at the storming, and openly rejoiced when the citizens were carried off into slavery, boasting loudly of their share in the terrible catastrophe (Obad. 11–14). They were never forgotten for their base and cruel treachery. The enemies of God not only make sport of the misfortunes of His people, but show their vindictiveness in doing all they can to intensify their sufferings. 3. *They seize with avaricious haste the possessions they help to ruin.* "These two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it" (ver. 10). The Edomites not only re-entered the cities captured from them by David when he was settling the boundaries of the Hebrew empire, but they made inroads into Southern Palestine, taking possession of the towns as far as Hebron. The race of the warrior kings of Judah who had kept them in check was extinct, and the country was too feeble to resist the rapacity of the Idumeans. The enemies of God are ever eager to make gain out of the troubles

they have helped to create. 4. *They are ignorant of the Power they rashly defy.* "Whereas the Lord was there" (ver. 10). What a sublime stroke of the prophetic pen! The sentence breaks in like a flash of lightning—the Lord is there! The land is desolate, but not forsaken; conquered, but not surrendered. Israel has been carried away, but not Israel's God. The land and the people still belong to Him. This fact is flashed out to rebuke the presumption of Edom; but Edom sees it not, heeds it not. Like all the enemies of God, in his blind infatuation he wrestles with a Power that ultimately crushes him.

III. **That the enemies of God will be inevitably destroyed.** 1. *Their destruction will be a Divine act.* "I will stretch out mine hand against thee" (ver. 3). The Being they had insulted and defied vindicated His honour and supremacy by their righteous punishment. Josephus informs us that, soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar turned his arms against Edom and the adjoining nations and defeated them with great slaughter. As in the conquest of Israel, Nebuchadnezzar was the instrument of Jehovah in working out the doom of Edom. Jeremiah (chap. xlix.), Ezekiel (chaps. xxv., xxxv.), and Obadiah describe in graphic language the fearful ravage of the Chaldean forces. **The ordinary raids of robber tribes might be beaten off, for the Edomites had a reputation for warlike valour; but the Chaldees were irresistible, and were** accustomed to do their work with desolating thoroughness. The enemies of God are helpless when His power is put forth to chastise. 2. *Their destruction will be on account of their inveterate wickedness.* "I will do according to thine anger, envy, hatred, blasphemies, boasting" (vers. 11–13, 15). Their malignity towards God and His chosen people was hereditary, and was nourished from generation to generation. Their impregnable position among the hills increased their haughtiness; they boasted of the wisdom of their great men, and they had all the insolence of wealth, their country being situated in the route of commerce from north to south. They were continually stirring up the jealousies of the tribes, and were always as sharp thorns in the side of Israel. But their course of wickedness had an end; their sins ruined them. 3. *Their destruction will be by the same weapon with which they destroyed others.* "Because thou hast shed blood by the force of the sword" (vers. 5, 6). The law of retribution is ever operating with surprising exactitude and impartiality. Edom had wrought incredible horrors with the sword and been reckless in shedding human blood. By the sword shall he be punished, and be surfeited with a very carnival of slaughter and bloodshed. **Joab was slain by the weapon with which he murdered Abner and Amasa years previously (1 Kings ii. 28–34). Dogs lapped the blood and picked the bones of Jezebel, as they had done to Naboth, the victim of her fury, fifteen years before (2 Kings ix. 36).** 4. *Their destruction will be complete and irrevocable.* "I will make thee most desolate" (vers. 3, 4, 7, 9, 15). Thirty ruined towns within three days' journey of the Red Sea attest the former greatness of Edom. The utter desolation that fell on the country and on the descendants of Esau is one of the most impressive facts of history. They were formerly distinguished for wisdom, now they are sunk in the grossest folly. They regard the ruins around them as the work of spirits. The tribes now wandering in Edom are savage and treacherous. Even the Arabs are afraid to enter the country, or to conduct any party within its borders. The desolation is irrecoverable, and travellers state that the whole region is a vast expanse of sand drifted up from the Red Sea (Isa. xxxiv. 6–15; Jer. xlix. 7–22). The enemies of God will be smitten beyond the power of recovery. 5. *Their destruction will be a vindication of the character of the Being they madly oppose.* "Thou shalt know that I am the Lord" (vers. 4, 9, 11, 12, 15).

LESSONS.—1. *Active opposition to the good is the offspring of intensified hatred.*

2. *It is utterly futile to oppose God.* 3. *The Divine vengeance may be averted by timely submission and repentance.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–15. "Why, in this connection, should Edom have alone been singled out for destruction? Not as if her people only were appointed to suffer vengeance at the hand of God, but because, in the bitterness of their spite and the intensity of their hatred to the cause and people of God, they stood pre-eminent among the nations, and so were fitly chosen as the representatives of the whole. The region where the greatest enmity reigned is the ideal territory where the final recompenses of judgment take place. The Edomite spirit, the carnal, unbelieving, rebellious spirit, is most surely doomed to perdition: enmity to the cause and kingdom of Christ is marked out in the councils of heaven for irretrievable ruin. They who are of it cannot overthrow the Church, but must themselves be overthrown and fall under the stroke of vengeance."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 3. "When punishments break in and are already taking their course, in this God, as it were, stretches out His hand. Now, since His hand is not shortened to help His children, so also it is not too weak to punish His enemies (Isa. lix. 1)."—*Starke.*

Ver. 4. "When godliness goes out of cities, confusion and devastation enter in. We can never sufficiently recognise that God alone is eternal."—*Lange.*

Vers. 5–7. **Hatred**—1. One of the fruits of sin. 2. A prolific source of other evil passions. 3. Is intensified in virulence the longer it is cherished. 4. Prompts to deeds of cruelty and bloodshed. 5. Will be signally punished.

— "The fiercest mutual hatred had for centuries thrust apart the brother-races of Jacob and Esau. The refusal of a passage through Mount Seir to the Hebrews under Moses, in their march from Egypt nine hundred years before, had entailed the long sufferings of the wilderness life, and had never been forgotten. Under Joram, Amaziah, and Uzziah in succession, it had been virtually a Jewish province, till the reign of the weak Ahaz. The destruction of Jerusalem, however, had at last given the Edomites a chance of revenge, and they had indulged it to the uttermost."—*Geikie.*

Ver. 5. "Edom was of the same stock, brother to Jacob, and it was sin to envy, but greater to hate, and greatest to retain a perpetual hatred, an hereditary enmity from Esau's time, the father of the Edomites, till now: near one thousand two hundred years had the seed of Esau hated Jacob's seed for inheriting the blessing, which they as little valued as their father did before them."—*Pool.*

— "To afflict the afflicted is cruel. This is scarcely of man, bad as he is. He must be possessed by the malignant spirit of the devil, when he wounds the wounded, exults over the miseries of the afflicted, and seeks opportunities to add affliction to those who are already under the rod of God."—*A. Clarke.*

— "Edom is often in Scripture made the type of the most bitter and inveterate enemies of God's people in all ages. The hatred of brothers, when they are at variance, is proverbially rancorous. Such was Esau's hatred of Jacob, though the latter averted it by soft words and conciliatory acts; and such was the inherited bitterness of Esau's descendants towards Israel."—*Fausset.*

— "Where enmity leads to: it perpetuates itself by degrees in the heart; it is not afraid even to use the sword: first the malice of the tongue, and then the violence of malice. There

fore, always become reconciled at once and completely, that no roots may remain in the heart which may shoot up afterwards.—The prayer of an implacable man is certain not to be heard."—*Lange.*

Ver. 6. "Even blood shall pursue thee." "As a bloodhound. It shall, it shall; believe me, it shall."—*Trapp.*

— "The track of blood behind so many celebrated figures in history, behind so many so-called great exploits.—The shedding of blood a characteristic symptom of the world, a mark of the spirit that rules in the world, and of the wickedness in which it lies."—*Lange.*

Ver. 7. "Trade and intercourse cease where God sends His judgments. The Lord destroys nations that delight in war."—*Lange.*

Ver. 9. "Edom's sin was perpetual hatred, and Edom's punishment shall be perpetual desolations. Edomites would never return into friendship with the Israelites, but still hate, molest, and waste them; now, for just recompense, Edom's cities shall be wasted, and never return to their former glory."—*Pool.*

— "Sin is not to become eternalised; therefore eternal punishment."—*Starck.*

Ver. 10. "Whereas the Lord was there." **The Presence of God—1.** A reality though unrecognised. **2.** A comfort in the midst of desolation and suffering. **3.** The hope and guarantee of deliverance and future prosperity. **4.** A startling revelation to His enemies.

Vers. 10, 11. "The overthrow and exile of the Israelites from their land ought to have moved Edom to self-examination, lest there should be in herself sins found which might provoke God to inflict similar judgments. Instead of this, she regarded Israel's calamity as her opportunity. 'These two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it.' She forgot, in her wicked presumption, that the land of Israel was peculiarly the Lord's possession and the Lord's earthly dwelling-place; therefore, so far was Edom from being about to gain possession of Israel's inheritance, that she was about to be deprived of her own, and that for ever."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 11–15. **The Triumph of the Wicked—1.** Finds its joy in the downfall of those they hated (vers. 11, 15). **2.** Is unreal: their conquered possessions a desolation; their boasting hollow and joyless (vers. 12–15). **3.** Is soon changed to dejection, while all else rejoice (ver. 14).

Vers. 12, 13. **The Speech of the Wicked—1.** *Blasphemous.* "All thy blasphemies which thou hast spoken" (ver. 12). **2.** *Boastful.* "With your mouth ye have boasted" (ver. 13). **3.** *Copious in its insolent vocabulary.* "Ye have multiplied your words against Me" (ver. 13). **4.** *Does not escape Divine notice.* "I have heard thee" (ver. 13).

Ver. 13. "Worldly men think lightly of speaking vindictive and calumnious words against the people of God, and of forming projects for taking selfish advantage of their times of extremity, but God regards such words against His people as spoken against Himself. There is not a word that goeth out of our lips which God does not hear. How careful and guarded we should be in our words, especially in times when our carnal passions and tempers are excited! (Prov. x. 19)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 14, 15. "What an entire reversal of the present order of things there will be at the second coming of Christ! The enemies of God, who so often seem now to triumph, shall then be cast down in everlasting sorrow. The people of God, Israel and the elect Church, who so often now mourn, shall then rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Edom, that rejoiced over fallen Israel, shall then mourn over her own irretrievable fall while 'Jerusalem shall be a rejoicing

and her people a joy.' Let us see that we take our portion now with the people of God in their season of trial, that so we may have our everlasting portion with them in their coming blessedness."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 14. **Suffering** — 1. Aggravated when all around is gay. 2. Has always in it a depressing element of loneliness. 3. Has special significance when we are conscious it is Divinely inflicted.

— "When the whole land of Israel rejoiceth; as it is sometimes hale and well with the Church when the wicked are in the suds. Judea was the world of the world, as Athens was the Epitome of Greece, the Greece of Greece."—*Trapp.*

— "When the whole earth is in peace and plenty and enjoys both, thou shalt want all; and then envy at the welfare of others shall break thy heart. Envy was thy sin, and now what is the object of envy—the prosperity of others—shall be thy grief."—*Pool.*

— "No true grace without justice. The theocracy must accordingly pass through the fire of affliction and become purified: for the same reason, the heathenism whose iniquity is full must show that it has fallen under the Divine justice. For grace is not toleration of the bad."—*Havernick.*

Ver. 15. "The Edomites who thought of seizing on others' lands, lost their own. They who covet all do oft lose all, yea, even the pleasure of that they possess; as a greedy dog swallow eth the whole meat that is cast him, without any pleasure, as gaping still for the next morsel."—*Trapp.*

—"Thou tookest pleasure in the ruin of My people; for this thy sin I will ruin thee, and then do to thee as thou didst; I will retaliate and rejoice in thy ruin: thou helpedst to make Jerusalem desolate; I will make thee so: thou criedst to ruin them all, to destroy all the land; all thy land shall be ruined, and by these judgments I will be known to be the Lord."—*Pool.*

— "This whole chapter strongly inculcates this maxim—Do as thou wouldst be done by, and what thou wouldst not have done to thee, do not to others. And from it we learn that every man may, in some sort, be said to make his own temporal good or evil; for as he does to others God will take care to do to him, whether it be evil or good, weal or woe. Would you not be slandered or backbitten? Then do not slander or backbite. Wouldst thou wish to live in peace? Then do not disturb the peace of others. Be merciful, and thou shalt obtain mercy."—*A. Clarke.*

The Promise of Better Days for Israel. (Chap. xxxvi.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"Ye mountains of Israel"**—in contrast to *Mount Seir* of the previous prophecy. They are here personified: Israel's elevation is moral, not merely physical, as Edom's.

Ver. 2. **"The ancient high places."** "The perpetual heights are the natural mountains, as a figure of the unchangeable grandeur of which Israel boasted, because it had the Eternal for its protector, and in Him the security of its own perpetuity" (comp. Ps. cxxv. 2).—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 3. **"Made you desolate and swallowed you up"**—laid you waste, and panted after you on every side; like wild beasts after their prey, implying the greedy cupidity of Edom as to Israel's inheritance. **"Ye are taken up in the lips of talkers"**—literally, "Ye are made to go up on the lip of the tongue, *i.e.*, on the lip of the slanderer, the man of tongue. Edom slandered Israel because of the connection of the latter with Jehovah, as though He were unable to save them."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 4. **"Thus saith the Lord, to the mountains, hills,"** &c. The mer-

tion of particulars is meant to point to the eye which observes all, the Divine care which beholds each and all, over which only a human eye weeps, or, on the contrary, rejoices. The completeness of the renewed blessedness of all parts of the land is implied.

Ver. 5. "**With joy of heart, despiteful minds, to cast it out as a prey**"—"with gladness of heart and deadly scorn, have appropriated My land to desolate and plunder it."—*Geikie.*

Ver. 7. "**Shall bear their shame**"—shall bear their share of contempt in turn—a perpetual shame, whereas the shame that Israel bore from these heathen was only temporary.

Ver. 8. "**Shall shoot forth your branches and yield fruit to My people, for they are at hand to come**"—"shall shoot out your verdure and yield your fruits to My people Israel, for they will soon come."—*Geikie.* "Leaves and branches come into view as food for cattle, while the fruit is for man. Of the seventy years Chaldean servitude twenty had already elapsed, so that many of those still living might yet see the joyful day."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 11. "**Will do better unto you than at your beginnings**"—"better than in your past. This was fulfilled when He appeared in the Holy Land who could say of Himself, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,' and who far outshone Solomon in all his glory."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 14. "**Thou shalt devour men no more, neither bereave thy nations any more.**" "The land of Israel had a dangerous position. It was a land of transit, an apple of discord for the Asiatic and African powers, and exposed to oppression by the surrounding nations of the wilderness, who always went to it for barter. On account of this dangerous position it is designated, even in Num. xiii. 32, as a land that devours its inhabitants. Precisely such a land had God chosen for His people. They should always have occasion to look up to Him; and when they fell away the rods were also laid up. Peaceful seclusion would have produced a stagnant condition, the worst that can befall the people of God. It is essential to the Church in this world to be militant."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 19. "**I scattered them among the heathen.**" "The reason for their removal was their sin, which God's holiness could not let pass unpunished."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 20. "**They profaned My holy name.**" "The name of My holiness is not simply the holy name of Jehovah, but the name in which His holiness is manifest, so that by it man names His holiness, and hence the Holy God Himself."—*Lange.*

Ver. 21. "**I had pity for Mine holy name**"—"I felt pity for it. God's own name, so dishonoured, was the primary object of His pitying concern, then His people secondarily through His concern for it."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 23. "**I will sanctify My great name**"—"*i.e.*, My holiness as expressed in My name, securing due weight to it, so that it shall not simply be named as name, but evidently experienced as fact. In its being the name of His holiness lies the necessity, when the people who thus name God do not sanctify it, but, on the contrary, only contribute everywhere to its profanation, that then Jehovah should take in hand the sanctification of His name, and thereby of Himself."—*Lange.* "**Shall be sanctified in you before their eyes**"—"or before your eyes. It must be done first before the eyes of the people who by their depravity had lost sight of God's real character; and then what was seen by them experimentally would also be seen reflectively by the heathen who dwelt around."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 25. "**Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall**

be clean." "The external restoration must be preceded by an internal one. The change in their condition must not be superficial, but must be based on a radical renewal of the heart."—*Fausset.* "The immediate sense of the verse is: That Jehovah leads back Israel from exile into their own land, and consecrates them there to be a people, since the punishment, so characteristic for the sin that occasioned it, is shown to be removed by the bringing of them again into their own land, the forgiveness of sins thereby already proclaimed at once evinces and manifests itself as purification of the people, and the people put from them their old life, especially their idolatry."—*Lange.*

Ver. 26. **"I will give you a heart of flesh"**—not carnal in opposition to spiritual, but impressible and docile fit for receiving the good seed.

Ver. 27. **"I will cause you to walk in My statutes."** "From the bestowment of the new heart flows the altered position toward the law of God."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 29. **"I will also save you from all your uncleannesses"**—the province of Jesus, according to His name (Matt. i. 21). To be specially exercised in behalf of the Jews in the latter days (Rom. xi. 26). **"And I will call for the corn"**—"as a master calls for a servant. All the powers and productions of nature are the servants of Jehovah (Ps. cv. 16; Matt. viii. 8, 9)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 31. **"Then shall ye remember your own evil ways"**—"with shame and loathing. The unexpected grace and love of God manifested in Christ to Israel shall melt the people into true repentance, which mere legal fear could not (chap. xvi. 61, 63; Ps. cxxx. 4; Zech. xii. 10 · Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9)."—*Fausset*

Ver. 35. **"This land is become like the garden of Eden."** "We have here the clear counterpart of the night-piece (Joel ii. 3). The comparison of this fundamental passage, according to which the figure of the land of Eden can only signify a prosperous state in general, shows how erroneous it is to find in this passage the restoration of Canaan to a really paradisiac glory, and to charge those who cannot find this in it with a spiritualising evaporation."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 36. **"I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it."** "I, Jehovah, whose name and nature afford a security that between speaking and doing no gulf can be fixed."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 37. **"I will yet for this be inquired of"**—"so as to grant it. On former occasions He had refused to be inquired of by Israel, because the inquirers were not in a fit condition of mind to receive a blessing (chap. xiv. 3; xx. 3). But hereafter, as in the restoration from Babylon (Neh. viii., ix.; Dan. ix. 3–23), God will prepare His people's hearts to pray aright for the blessings which He is about to give (Ps. cii. 13–17, 20; Zech. xii. 10–14; xiii. 1)."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 37, 38. **"I will increase them with men like a flock, as the holy flock."** "The passover was the only one among the festivals in which there was a great accumulation of sheep, with which the fulness of men in restored Israel is compared. But the *consecrated* sheep are meant here, not any other gathering of sheep, because the people that is compared with the sheep is the people of the saints of the Lord. The fulfilment is to be sought in the Church of Christ still more than in the times between the exile and Christ."—*Hengstenberg.*

HOMILETICS.

Hope for a Ruined Nation.

(Vers. 1-15.)

In this chapter the prophet continues the theme with which his whole soul was possessed—the prospective revival and prosperity of Israel. In the darkest day of national desolation the lamp of prophecy glowed with a Divinely kindled flame. The land is smitten and helpless; but hope is still left, though that hope is enshrined for the time in the breast of one man, as in the fatal box of Pandora, from which issued all the evils that afflict mankind, hope was still left at the bottom. The keen spiritual insight of Ezekiel saw that, amid the prevailing ruin, Israel still retained an interest in the power and faithfulness of God which would bring about her future restoration, while the exulting hopes of the heathen that her downfall was permanent were doomed to disappointment. Observe—

I. **That a ruined nation is an object of Divine compassion.** 1. *He sees its resources exhausted.* "They have made you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side" (ver. 3). The land is denuded of its inhabitants and its wealth. The hills are there, but they are no longer covered with grazing flocks and herds. The valleys are there, but the diligent husbandmen are gone, and the fields and vineyards degenerate into barrenness or are choked with the wild growths of untamed luxuriousness. The cities crumble to ruin and are forsaken. The hum of commerce is hushed, and the animated scenes of a thriving population are no longer visible. The garden has become a wilderness, the ground a grave in which the national life lies buried. 2. *He sees its land possessed with strangers.* "Even the high places are ours—a possession unto the residue of the heathen—which have appointed My land into their possession with the joy of all their heart, with despiteful minds" (vers. 2, 3, 5). The strangers had no right to the land; it belonged to God: nor would they have dared to seize it had His people, to whom it had been given as a heritage, remained faithful to Him. They were marauders, robbers, who pounced upon the land with the avaricious joy with which the wreckers plunder a stranded ship. It was "cast out for a prey." It moved the compassion and indignation of Jehovah to see His heritage overrun and pilfered by those who fiercely hated both Him and His people. 3. *He sees its ruin the sport and mockery of its enemies.* "Aha, the places are ours—ye are taken up in the lips of talkers and are an infamy of the people—a prey and derision to the heathen" (vers. 2, 3, 4). They gloat over the misfortunes of the nation they hated and dreaded. Israel had become a byword and a reproach. The foulest slander was freely circulated, and her enemies chuckled with a hideous satisfaction as they rolled the toothsome morsel in their mouths. Every taunt would rankle like a poisoned barb as the unhappy Israelite reflected it was a just recompense for his inveterate folly. This state of things was faithfully predicted (Jer. xxiv. 9), and nothing was done to prevent it. The warning was despised. Abandoned by God and man, Israel was exposed to the pitiless contempt of the wicked. And yet the heart of Jehovah yearned with compassion towards His afflicted people.

II. **That Divine Power can restore a ruined nation to prosperity.** 1. *He can do it speedily.* "They are at hand to come" (ver. 8). Though there were fifty of the seventy years' captivity yet to run, it was near at hand in God's

determination. Fifty years is a long period in the life of an individual, but it is insignificant in the life of a nation. The time is near because it is sure to come. Though Israel was far from home, dispersed in many countries, and held in bondage by the power of her captors, she shall be brought again to her own land. Time is a trifling factor in the working out of eternal purposes; and yet many then living were privileged to witness the promised restoration. God is slow to punish; swift to bless. 2. *He can do it effectually* (vers. 8–15). The waste places shall be tilled and sown (ver. 8), the earth abound in fruitfulness (ver. 8), the hills covered with flocks and herds (ver. 11), the cities rebuilt and crowded with inhabitants (ver. 10), commerce expand with ever-increasing activity (ver. 11), the taunt of desolation silenced (ver. 15), and the land that had cast out its people to perish shall support and cherish them on a scale of unexampled munificence (vers. 11–15). When a penitent nation returns to God there is no blessing He will withhold: its grievances are redressed, its honour retrieved, its peace and prosperity ensured.

III. **That the promise of Divine help inspires national hope.** Israel was utterly prostrate. There was no country in that neighbourhood so desolate and forsaken. The land of plenty was cursed with emptiness, and, like an unnatural mother, had cast out its children to perish. Browbeaten, calumniated, and oppressed by their enemies, the people lost heart and sank into the helplessness of despair. They had no more hope of revival than the salt-encrusted pine-logs that travellers tell us are strewn on the shores of the Dead Sea, saturated for centuries with brine. Left to themselves, there was no possibility of recovery. But they were not to be so completely abandoned. Gradually, and at first faintly, whispers of Divine help reached their ears. The impression grew in distinctness and strength that the promise was real, and at length out of the dark firmament of their miseries the bright star of hope once more shone forth. They had ample evidence, from past experiences, that what Jehovah promised He would surely perform. The worst of sinners need not despair; for him the hope of salvation shines, the promise is still in force. Let him but repent and cry for help, and all will yet be well.

LEARN—1. *That there is power in the midst of apparent impotency.* 2. *That national revival begins in the putting away of national sins.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–15. God and Nature. 1. God never forgets His absolute proprietorship in nature. His are the mountains, hills, rivers, and valleys, for He made them (vers. 4–6). 2. Nature remains true to God when man is unfaithful. Man may desolate but cannot destroy nature. The unchanging continuity of its mountains, hills, rivers, and valleys rebukes his fickleness and infidelity. 3. Nature is honoured by signal displays of Divine power. "The mountains of Israel" had witnessed the miracles of God on behalf of His chosen people, and while the earth stands their voiceless testimony will abide. 4. Nature responds with grateful quickness to the touch of the Divine blessing. "Ye mountains shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit. I will multiply upon you man and beast, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings" (vers. 8–11). 5. God will make nature a fruitful inheritance to the obedient (vers. 12–15).

— **Man and Nature.** 1. Man regards nature as an opportunity to indulge a covetous spirit. "The places are ours in possession" (ver. 2). 2. Man abuses the resources of nature by sinful extravagance. "They have made

you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side" (ver. 3). 3. It is an evidence of great moral debasement when man exults over the desolations of nature he himself has made. "The enemy hath said against you, 'Aha! —Ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are an infamy of the people—a prey and derision—with the joy of all their heart, with despiteful minds, to cast it out for a prey" (vers. 2, 3–5). 4. When man violates nature he violates the laws of God, and suffers accordingly. "Thou land devourest up men, and hast bereaved thy nations" (ver. 13). 5. When man obeys God, all the resources of nature minister to his enjoyment (vers. 8–15).

Vers. 1–4. "The grand distinction between the people of God as Israel, and the people of the world as Edom, is, whereas the latter are finally given over to destruction, the former are only chastened for a time, and shall be finally and completely delivered. The people of the world may now seem exalted to a great height, but their elevation is of a carnal and material kind, and is therefore transitory. The elevation of the Israel of God is spiritual, and therefore permanent. Her hills are 'the everlasting hills' (Gen. xlix. 26). The Mount Zion, as the seat of God's earthly throne, cannot be removed, but abideth for ever (Ps. cxxv. 1). Therefore Edom's shout of triumph over the fallen Israel shall be turned into wailing for her own fall. She had greedily thought to take possession of the ancient high places of the people of God. Nay more, she had turned into derision the promise of perpetuity which God had given to His people, as though that promise was now proved to be abortive, and had sneered at Israel's connection with Jehovah as though He were unable to save them."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 2. "Many were the enemies of God's people, but they so conspired in one design, and were so one in their humours, enmity, and carriage, that the prophet speaks of them as one, and particularly of Edom."—*Pool.*

— "The scorn of the world an old experience. Thus were the prophets and Christ reproached, and the Lord said that men would speak all manner of evil against His disciples (Matt. v. 11), and Paul, that we should be a spectacle to the world (1 Cor. iv 9)." —*Lange.*

Ver. 3. "Ye are taken up on the lips of talkers, and are an infamy of the people." Slander. 1. A vice of great talkers. 2. Is devoid of compassion for the unfortunate. 3. Delights in exaggeration and malicious innuendoes. 4. Is frequently employed to disparage and afflict the people of God.

— "Ye are made to ascend upon the lip of the tongue and upon the evil fame of the people. God takes it extreme ill that His people should be traduced and defamed, which hath been their lot in all ages, but He will not fail to vindicate them and to avenge them."—*Trapp.*

— "God knows, sees, and hears the misery of His children: that must comfort them, therefore they cannot despair. How ready men often are not only to count up the sufferings of others, but also in their talk to exaggerate still more."—*Starck.*

Vers. 4–6. **The Divine Sympathy with Nature.** 1. Because it is His handiwork and reflects His character. 2. Because it is the dwelling-place and training ground of man. 3. Because of the havoc wrought in it by the fury of His enemies. 4. Because it is ever faithful and obedient to His laws.

Vers. 6, 7. **Wrong-doing.** 1. Rouses the Divine anger. 2. Is doomed while it rejoices in its brief triumph. 3. Will suffer the misery it inflicts on others. 4. Is certain to be Divinely punished.

Ver. 6. "To these lifeless creatures He directeth His speech to show that every creature groaneth and waileth

for the redemption of our bodies. It fareth the better also in this life present, for the elect's sake, as it was once cursed for man's sin, and hath lain bedridden, as it were, ever since." —*Trapp.*

Ver. 7. "The righteous God, to whom vengeance belongs, will render shame for shame. Those that put contempt and reproach on God's people will sooner or later have it turned upon themselves; perhaps in this world, either their follies or their calamities, their miscarriages or their mischances, shall be their reproach; at furthest, in that day when all the impenitent shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt."—*M. Henry.*

— "They shall be paid home in their own coin, be overshot in their own bow, be covered with their own confusion."—*Trapp.*

Vers. 8–15. **The Fertility of Nature.** 1. A signal proof of the Divine blessing. "Behold I am for you. And I will multiply" (vers. 8, 9). 2. Evidenced in the abundant increase of fruit, cattle, men and wealth (vers. 8–11). 3. Should be regarded by the people of God as a special blessing. "Even My people Israel shall possess thee, and thou shalt be their inheritance" (ver. 12). 4. The more conspicuous because of former barrenness and decay (vers. 13–15). 5. A type of the future prosperity of the people of God.

— "While Edom and Tyre rejoiced in their sins at the fall of Jerusalem, the jealousy of the Lord was roused to say that they should return, and as Jeremiah had said that fields and vineyards should again be sold in that city. The promises, like clouds of refreshing rain, scatter their blessings on every age. They were in one form or other continually repeated, and in all the glowing powers of Oriental language. But however justified the prophets might be in the use of hyperbole and metaphor, they could not exceed the truth, which would have been the case had their promises been restricted to the weak but rising times of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. And if the waste places were rebuilt, why then, whole Palestina, dost thou lie very much in ruins to this day? Consequently the gracious cloud of covenant blessings only scattered its drops on Jewish ages, and gave showers to the primitive church, reserving its fulness, or the residue of the Spirit, for the mountain of His holiness in the glory of the latter day."—*Sutcliffe.*

— "A certain fulfilment of the most literal kind began at an early period to be given to the prophecy. People of the stock of Israel did again possess the land of their fathers; by them the mountains of Israel were again cultivated, and for them the land yielded its fruit; there again, as of old, the seed of man and of beast did greatly increase and multiply, so that the region was known for ages as one of the most fertile and prosperous in Asia, and that too while the old and hereditary enemies of Israel in the neighbourhood sank into comparative insignificance and lost their original place in the scale of nations. Had Israel but seen in all this the hand of God, and viewed the whole in connection with His unchangeable righteousness, there should certainly have been nothing wanting to complete the correspondence between the description of the prophet and the facts of history. But the old relations of the covenant people with the kingdom of God give way; the outward Israel are no longer distinctively the covenant people—all the children of faith of every land become the seed of blessing and heirs according to the promise. And while it is only under the Gospel dispensation that we can expect the perfect realisation of the promised good, we must now no longer expect it after the old form, or according to the simply literal interpretation. The good is too great and expansive to be now shut up within such narrow limits, for since wherever there is a royal priesthood offering up spiritual services to God, there the incense and offerings of the temple are perpetuated

(Mal. i. 11; 1 Pet. ii. 5), so wherever there are members of Christ there also are the mountains of Canaan, there are the people who have the promise of all things for their portion, on whom descends the blessing—life for evermore. Nor can the old evils properly return again, for the good is avowedly connected with nothing but a spiritual qualification, and is entirely dissevered from a merely ancestral relationship or a political existence in the world."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 8. "Thus shall the ruined churches bring fruit, wine, and bread, that is, the mysteries of doctrine to the profit of the people, that they may no longer be rude and ignorant, but a people taught of God. Therefore the spiritual husbandmen, vine-dressers, till and sow diligently. With the plough of fear they turn up the soil of the heart in which they sow the new word of the Gospel, whereby the forsaken churches become planted anew; and these are the mountains which the Lord addresses."—*Heim-Hoffman.*

Vers. 9–11. "The Lord declares to the people of Israel, 'Behold, I am for you.' Since God is ultimately to be for them, no power can avail anything that is against them. God will 'turn to' His people in mercy, and they shall at the same time turn to Him in repentance. The restoration to their own land is to be literal, and all things and all persons in the restored state of Israel are to share in the coming blessedness—'the mountains, the hills, the rivers, the valleys, the desolate wastes, the houses, the cities, man and beast.' So in the case of the spiritual Israel, the true Church: she is now a little and despised flock, but she shall at last be a multitude which no man can number (Rev. vii. 9); whereas the antichristian faction, and all the carnal, worldly, and unbelieving, who shall for a time seem to triumph over the Church of Christ (Rev. xi. 7–11), shall perish awfully and everlastingly."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 9. "It is a blessing to the earth to be made serviceable to men, especially to good men that will serve God with cheerfulness in the use of those good things which the earth serves up to them."—*M. Henry.*

— "'I will turn unto you.' Look towards you with regard to what has been and is your estate, your sufferings, which were less than you deserved, yet were the greater because ye are mine. Your inhabitants gave me the back and sinned against me, and I turned the back on you and regarded you not: then all darkness covered you, now my face shall be towards you, and you shall prosper and be fruitful to the comfort of those that shall dwell in you and plough and sow you."—*Pool.*

Ver. 10. "They are far wrong who consider a great increase of men as a curse because it gives rise to want and distress. God can nourish many as well as few, and we should live moderately, avoid endeavouring to surpass others in expenditure, and seek for concord in families."—*Luther.*

Ver. 11. "God's kingdom in the world is a growing kingdom, and His Church, though for a time it may be diminished, shall recover itself and be again replenished."—*M. Henry.*

Ver. 12. "The promised good is always to be understood with the condition that men repent (Mal. iii. 7). The self-evident condition is, that they do not fill up the measure of their sins anew. There is no charter of immunity against Ye would not. How often is the country or a district made to bear the blame when there comes a pestilence among men or cattle, when it should be known that sin gaining the upper hand provoked God's wrath thereto."—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS.

SIN THE CAUSE OF NATIONAL RUIN.

(Vers. 16–21.)

Once more the Jews are reminded of the reason for the calamities that had overtaken them: the root-cause was their sin. It might seem strange to them that they, of all people, should be so deeply humiliated; but such was the obstinacy of their rebellion that no other course was open but for Jehovah to vindicate the cause of righteousness by unmistakable marks of His displeasure. So far as they were concerned they had no reason to expect anything but a continuance of His righteous severity; but a supreme regard for His holy name, which had influenced Him in bringing about their downfall, is now to operate in promoting their recovery. Their restoration must begin in the conviction and acknowledgment of their sins.

I. **Sin is a defilement of the national life** (ver. 17). It is so because it is a defilement of the individual life. Sin is the polluted heritage of universal man, for all have sinned; but it is intensely individual and personal. Its taint permeates every power and faculty of the man—"The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint: from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." Its seat is inward, and it is often disguised under a fair and beautiful exterior; but attack it, and its impurities soon become actively manifest, as the cuttle-fish surprised by an enemy emits an inky fluid that darkens and befouls the most pellucid waters. The nation is defiled because the citizen is defiled, and instead of seeking cleansing has stirred up the muddy sediment in himself and others. "Let sin be your deepest sorrow, your heaviest grief, the spring of many tears, the burden of many sighs, the occasion of daily visits to the cross of Calvary."

"Weep not for broad lands lost;
Weep not for fair hopes crossed;
Weep not when limbs wax old;
Weep not when friends grow cold;
Weep not that death must part
Thine and the best loved heart:
Yet weep—weep all thou can—
Weep, weep, because thou art
A sin-defiled man."

II. **Sin is a profanation of the Divine holiness** (vers. 20, 21). Sin is not only a degradation to man, but an injustice and injury towards God: it seems to drag Him to the level of man, and to rob Him of every attribute that constitutes Him Divine. The conduct and attendant miseries of the Israelites dishonoured Jehovah in the sight of the heathen, who naturally inferred that if this was all He could do for His worshippers, then He was no better than their own deities, and the morality of His people was in many respects inferior to that of their own. Do not think that your iniquities are unnoticed, or that you are the only one affected by them. The unbelieving world is watching you. The mere profession of religion is a caricature and a hypocrisy, and every act of sin is a defamation of the character of the holy God.

III. **Sin is punished by national ruin** (vers. 18, 19). The Jews were driven out of their own land because of their incorrigible wickedness. Their murders, idolatries, and injustice roused the anger of God, and "according to their way

and their doings" He adjudged them to punishment. His hand scattered them, and no power could detain them in the land when His hand was against them, just as no power could have disturbed their security if they had remained faithful to Him. The nation that makes an enemy of God is doomed. The strongest fortifications must yield, the astutest policy be confounded, commerce decay, wealth give way to poverty, and the proudest people be humbled to the dust. The first step in national ruin begins in moral wrong.

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 16-38. "There are mountain regions lying within the tropics where in the course of a single day the traveller finds every vegetable form peculiar to every line of latitude between the equator and the poles, and these all laid out in regular arrangement. Leaving the palms which cover the mountain's feet, he ascends into the regions of the olive; from these he rises to a more temperate climate, where vines festoon the trees, or trail their limbs along the naked rock; still ascending, he reaches a belt of oaks and chestnuts; from that he passes to rugged heights shaggy with the hardy pine; by-and-by he enters a region where trees are dwarfed into bushes; rising above that his foot presses a soft carpet of lowly mosses, till climbing the rocks where only the lichen lives, he leaves all life below; and now, shivering in the cold, panting in the thin air for breath, he stands on those dreary elevations where eternal winter sits on a throne of snow, and waving her icy sceptre, says to vegetation—'Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further.' Like some such lofty mountain of the tropics there are portions of the Divine Word where in a space of limited extent—within the short compass of a chapter, or even part of it—the more prominent doctrines of salvation are brought into juxtaposition and arranged side by side almost in systematic order. This portion of Scripture presents an epitome or outline of the Gospel. Its details, with their minute and varied beauties, are here, so to speak, in shade; but the grand truths of redemption stand boldly up, much as we have seen from sea the summits of a mountain range, or the lofty headlands of a dim and distant coast. We are aware that the Mosaic economy, and many of God's dealings with His ancient people, were but the shadows of good things to come; and when the things are come, why look at the shadow when you possess the substance? However valued in his absence the portrait of a son, what mother, when her boy is folded in her arms, and she has his loved and living face to gaze on, turns to the cold picture? What artist studies a landscape in the grey dawn when he may see it in the blaze of day? True. Yet such study has its advantages. It not seldom happens that a portrait brings to view certain shades of expression which we had not previously observed in the face of the veritable man; and when some magnificent form of architecture, or the serried ridges and rocky peaks of a mountain, have stood up between us and the lingering lights of day, we have found that although the minor beauties of fluted columns or frowning crags were lost in the shades of evening, yet, drawn in sharp and clear outline against a twilight sky, the effect of the whole was even more impressive than when eyed in the glare of day. Thus it may be well occasionally to examine the Gospel in the broad shadows and strongly defined outlines of an old economy; and through God's government of His ancient people to study the motives, the nature, and ends of His dealings with ourselves. In this way the passage before us has peculiar claims upon our attention."—*Guthrie's Gospel in Ezekiel.*

Ver. 16. "Man's previous course of

action is the cause of God's subsequent course of action. We shall have to give account not only because of the evil which we have done, but also for the good things which we have had. The world is perfect throughout where man does not come in to disturb it. Storms clear the air, an observation which bears application in regard to the judgments of God."—*Lange.*

Vers. 16, 17. "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man." **The Human Side of the Divine Message.** "The rain in its descent from heaven falls upon the surface of our earth, percolates through the porous soil, and flowing along rocky fissures or veins of sand, is conveyed below ground to the fountain whence it springs. Now, although rising out of the earth, that water is not of the earth earthy. The world's deepest well owes its treasures to the skies. So was it with the revealed will of God. It flowed along human channels, yet its origin was more than celestial, it was Divine. Those waters at whose pure and perennial springs faith drinks and lives, while conveyed to man along earthly channels, have their source far away—in the throne of God. No doubt God could have used other instrumentality. He might have commissioned angels on His errands of mercy, and spoken at all times, as He did sometimes, by seraph lips. With rare exceptions His ambassadors were men. The patriarchs, prophets, and apostles—those inspired missionaries of heaven—were all sons of men. In this arrangement observe—1. *The kindness of God to man.* Who has read the story of Moses without feeling that it was a very great kindness both to the infant and his mother that he had her bosom to lie on, and that God in His providence so arranged matters that the very mother of the child was hired to be its nurse. Who else could be expected to treat the outcast so lovingly and kindly? And I hold it a singular kindness to man that he is selected to be the instrument of saving his fellow-men. If that parent is happy who has snatched a beloved child from the flood or fire, and the child saved and thus twice given him becomes doubly dear, what happiness in purity or permanence to be compared with his who is a labourer with God in saving souls! 2. *The honour conferred on man.* What dignity does this world offer, what glittering stars, what jewelled honours flash on her swelling breast, to be for one moment compared with those which they win on earth and wear in heaven who have turned souls from darkness to light? As yon planet worlds that roll above us draw bright radiance from the sun around which they move, so surely shall they shine who spend and are spent in Jesus' service; they shall share His honours and shine in His lustre. It was the prayer of Brainerd, 'Oh that I were a flaming fire in the service of my God!' 3. *The wisdom of God.* Mirabeau said of a man who addressed the French Convention for the first time, 'That man will yet act a great part; he speaks as one who believes every word he says.' Much of pulpit power under God depends on that. They make others feel who feel themselves. It is true a man may impart light to others who does not himself see the light. It is true that like a concave speculum cut from a block of ice, which, concentrating the rays of the sun, kindles touchwood or explodes gunpowder, a preacher may set others on fire when his own heart is cold as frost. Yet commonly it happens that it is what comes from the heart of preachers that penetrates and affects the hearts of hearers. Like a ball red-hot from the cannon's mouth, he must burn himself who would set others on fire. If man may not feel what he preaches, angels could not. Man saved himself the more earnestly seeks the salvation of his perishing fellow-man. During a heavy storm off the coast of Spain a dismasted merchantman was observed by a British frigate drifting before the gale. Every eye and glass were on her, and a canvas shelter on a deck almost level with the sea sug-

gested the idea that even yet there might be life on board. With all their faults no men are more alive to humanity than our rough and hardy mariners; and so the order instantly sounds to put the ship about, and presently a boat is lowered, and starts with instructions to bear down upon the wreck. Away after that drifting hulk go these gallant men over the mountain swell of a roaring sea; they reach it, they shout, and now a strange object rolls from that canvas screen against the lee shroud of a broken mast. It is hauled into the boat. It proves to be the trunk of a man, bent head and knees together, so dried up and shrivelled as to be hardly felt within the ample clothes—so light that a mere boy lifted it on board. It is conveyed to the ship and laid on the deck. In horror and pity the crew gather around it. These feelings suddenly change into astonishment. The object shows signs of life. The seamen draw nearer; it moves and then mutters—in a deep sepulchral voice, mutters—'There is another man.' Rescued himself, the first use the saved one made of speech was to try to save another."—*Guthrie.*

Ver. 17. **The Defiler.** "1. *Sin a defilement.* Look at sin, pluck off that painted mask and turn upon her face the lamp of God's Word. We start, for it reveals a death's head. I stay not to quote texts descriptive of sin. It is a debt, a burden, a thief, a sickness, a leprosy, a plague, a poison, a serpent, a sting—everything that man hates it is. Name me the evil that springs not from this root—the crime that lies not at this door. Hypocrite and dead professor! let us open thy bosom: full of all corruption, how it smells like a charnel house! We are driven back by the noisome stench—we hasten to close the door. It is a painted, putrid sepulchre, whose fair exterior but aggravates the foulness within. 2. *The nature of this defilement.* (*a.*) It is internal. Like snowdrift, when it has levelled the churchyard mounds, and glistening in the winter sun, lies so pure, white, fair, and beautiful above the dead that fester and rot below, a plausible profession may wear the look of innocence and conceal from human eyes the foulest heart-corruption. The grass grows green upon the sides of the mountain that holds a volcano in its bowels. Behind the rosy cheek and lustrous eye of beauty how often does there lurk a deadly disease, the deadliest disease of all. Like these maladies, sin has its seat within. It is a disease of the heart, and the worst and deadliest of all heart-complaints. (*b.*) It is universal. Although the hues of the skin differ, the form of the skull and the features of the face are cast in different moulds, the features, colour, and character of the heart are the same in all men. In Adam all have died—have sinned, and therefore died. Thus sin, like our atmosphere, embraces every region of the world. Like death, it is universal. The tree is diseased not at the top, but at the root, and therefore no branch of the human family can possibly escape being affected by sin. (*c.*) It is incurable. What moral effect had God's judgments on His ancient people? As always happens in incurable diseases, the patient grew worse instead of better. As always happens when life is gone, the dead become more and more offensive. This internal and universal defilement is one which neither sorrows can atone for nor sufferings remove. I have seen the characters of the writing remain on paper which the flames had turned into a film of buoyant coal; I have seen the thread that had been passed through the fire retain in its cold grey ashes the twist which it had got in spinning; I have found every shivered splinter of the flint as hard as the unbroken stone; and let trials come in providence sharp as the fire and ponderous as the crushing hammer, unless a gracious God send along with these something else than these, bruised, broken, bleeding as thy heart may be, its nature remains the same."—*Guthrie.*

— Man Sinning. "1. *Man is fallen.* Compare man with any other of the creatures of God, and how directly we come to the conclusion that he is not, nor can be, the creature he came from his Maker's hands. Turn to the bloody horrors of this battlefield. The trampled ground lies thick with the mingled brave, the air is shaken with the most horrible sounds, every countenance expresses the passions of a fiend. Covering her eyes, humanity flies shrieking from the scene and leaves it to rage, revenge, and agony. Fiercer than the cannon's flash flames of wrath shoot from brothers' eyes; they draw, they brandish their swords, they sheath them in each other's bowels; every stroke makes a widow, every ringing volley scatters a hundred orphans on a homeless world. Sooner would I be an atheist, and believe there was no God, than that a man appears in this scene as he came from the hand of a Benignant Divinity. Man must have fallen. 2. *Apart from derived sinfulness man has personal sins to answer for.* You may deny original, but can any man in his senses deny actual sin? You may as well deny your existence; it sticks to you like your shadow. If every thread of life's web were yet to weave, what man would make the future a faithful copy of the past? No man living would. 3. *The guilt of these actual sins is man's own.* We attempt in vain to fix the blame on others—to lay the burden on any shoulders but our own. We talk of the strength, we plead the suddenness of temptation; but how often have we sinned designedly, deliberately, repeatedly? We have sinned when we knew we were sinning; we have repaired to scenes where we knew that we were to sin. We have done what the heathen never did, what Sodom and Gomorrah never did, what Tyre and Sidon never did—we have rejected a Saviour, and insanely refused eternal life."—*Guthrie.*

Vers. 18, 19. God's Punitive Justice. "1. *God is slow to punish.* No hand of clock goes so slow as His hand of vengeance. Look, for example, on the catastrophe of the Deluge. There was a truce of one hundred and twenty years between the first stroke of the bell and the first crash of the thunder. Noah grew grey preaching repentance. The ark stood useless for years, a huge laughing-stock for the scoffer's wit. Most patient God! God does pour out His fury; but His indignation is the volcano that groans loud and long before it discharges the elements of destruction and pours its fiery lavas on the vineyards at its feet. 2. *The truth of God requires the punishment of sin.* God has reiterated in a thousand ways the awful sentence—'The soul that sinneth it shall die.' Let sin go unpunished either in person or substitute; this saves the sinner—no doubt of that; but at what price? You save the creature's life at the expense of the Creator's honour. Your scheme exalts man, but far more than man is exalted is God degraded. By it no man is lost; but there is a greater loss—something more awful happens. The truth of God is lost; and in that loss His crown is spoiled of its topmost jewel, His kingdom totters, and the throne of the universe is shaken to its foundations. 3. *The love of God requires the punishment of sin.* Love for those who have the highest claim on a sovereign's protection requires that justice take her course and the guilty die. That the community may live in peace, that the citizen may feel safe in the bosom of his family, that streets may be safe to walk on, that beds may be safe to lie in, that our country may be fit to live in, crime must be punished. Divine love is no blind Divinity, and God being as wise as tender, sinners may rest assured that out of mere pity for them He will neither sacrifice the interests nor peril the happiness of His people. 4. *Unless sin is punished the language of Scripture appears extravagant.* Let me beseech, implore you to read with tears and prayers those passages of Scripture that unveil the miseries of the lost. Blot not from your minds what you cannot blot out of the book of God. The sufferings and miseries which

await the impenitent and unbelieving, God has painted in most appalling colours. They are such that, to save us from them, His Son descended from these heavens and expired upon a cross. They are such that when Paul thought of the lost he wept like a woman. The Gospel has in it elements of terror. But it is like our atmosphere—occasionally riven by the thunder and illumined by the fatal flash, at times the path of the stealthy pestilence, charged with elements of destruction and impregnated with the seeds of disease; but how much more a great magazine of health, filled with the most harmonious sounds, fragrant with the sweetest odours, hung with golden drapery, the pathway of sunbeams, the womb of showers, the feeder of fertilising streams, the parent of harvests, and the fountain of all earth's life! And, just as in that atmosphere which God has wrapped around our globe there is much more health than sickness, much more food than famine, much more life than death, so in the Bible there is much more love than terror."—*Guthrie.*

Ver. 19. "The scattering power of sin: in truth, it scatters the souls of men into the whole world, and that is already their judgment which sinners have to experience."—*Lange.*

— "God frequently repeats that His judgments upon the Jews were no more than what their own ways or doings obliged Him to inflict. There was in His dealings with them no arbitrary exercise of sovereignty, but they were dealt with according to their own conduct. And thus God deals with mankind in general: His actions in regard to them are not founded in an arbitrary exercise of His absolute sovereignty over them, but in impartial justice, wisdom, and goodness; and He judges them according to their own ways, and not according to the dictates of an arbitrary will."—*Benson.*

Vers. 20, 21. The Name of God—1. Is the expression of His immaculate holiness. 2. Is defamed by human sin. 3. Is misunderstood by those who witness the sufferings of His people. 4. Will vindicate to the universe its inviolable justice and righteousness.

Ver. 20. "They did profanely sin against those precepts of My law which heathens did know, venerate, and observe better than the Jews. Their heathen neighbours said, with taunt and cutting reprimand—'These are the people of the Lord.' These captive slaves, that are most forlorn of men, will have it that their God is the Lord, the mighty and the good God, the true and faithful One that gave them the land out of which they are driven. If He be good as they boast, how comes it to pass that His people are in such ill state? Was He weak and could not keep them in their own land, or doth He falsify His word? You miserable Jews, say what this meaneth. But by their impure life they opened the mouths of the heathens to blaspheme and call the holiness of God into question. When they saw His people so unholy they concluded—'As is the people so is their God;' and this, as it was a great offence and scandal to the heathen, so it was a great dishonour to God."—*Pool.*

— "With the sinner goes also his curse, his other shadow.—Thus this chapter teaches us how the first petition of the Lord's prayer should be understood. The name of the Lord is hallowed as well by the prosperity of the elect, which may obtain even under the cross, as by their purification from sin.—A bad life ought not to put good doctrine in question."—*Lange.*

Ver. 21. "God His own justification in this world.—God sanctifies His name among men by benefits as well as by judgments and punishments."—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS.

SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY.

(Vers. 22–38.)

I. Is bestowed as an act of unmerited Divine goodness (vers. 22–24). Israel had forfeited all claim to the Divine pity; they had broken every clause in their part of the covenant. No injustice would have been done had they been passed by for ever and another nation selected to carry out the work in which they had so signally failed. But the Divine honour must be vindicated. The Lord had chosen Israel, had wedded Himself to them in closest union of both promise and blessing, had lavished upon them the love of His great heart and made them distinguished by miracles of power. Must all this go for nothing? Amid the general defection He did not overlook the fact that a few remained faithful. And yet, not for their sake, nor for the sake of the people who had so cruelly disappointed and wronged Him, but for His own Name's sake, He resolves upon the vindication of His honour. That vindication had been partially seen in the punishment, but is to be more fully displayed in the restoration and prosperity of His people. An old lesson, which the world in all ages has been so slow to take in, is to be again enforced —that spiritual good is superior to and the only sound basis of temporal good. Our smallest mercies are undeserved. How unfathomable is the goodness which continually surrounds us with spiritual riches!

II. Begins in a thorough renovation of the moral nature. 1. *Sin is removed* (ver. 25). There is no possibility of the future being better than the present unless the heart is cleansed from sin. Man is powerless to do this (Jer. ii. 22). It is an act of God. The ceremonial cleansing of the Law was typical of the spiritual cleansing of the Gospel. The Divine cleansing is thorough and complete—"Ye shall be cleansed from all your filthiness and from all your foul gods." 2. *A new nature acquired* (ver. 26). The old nature was full of idolatries; the new shall be clear of these. The old nature was stubborn, stolid, hard as stone; the new shall be soft, tender, impressionable, receiving the Divine impress as the melted wax receives the impress of the seal. The human shall be suffused, interpenetrated, and transformed by the Divine. It is a spiritual miracle. Man can mould the intellect and modify the disposition, but God alone can change and renew the heart. 3. *The renovation evidenced by practical obedience* (ver. 27). In the spiritual world, as in the physical, every effect must have an adequate cause, and the effect must ever be in harmony with the nature and operative force of the cause. A life of moral obedience is the practical outcome of the influence of moral law acting at the centre of activity. Physical law is inflexible, and must ever produce the same class of phenomena with unvarying regularity. Moral law is not less unalterable, but it operates within the sphere of human freedom and cannot produce the same cast-iron sameness of results as is done in the unchanging operations of physical law: it respects the free, voluntary exercise of the human will. The Spirit of God so operates upon all the powers of the soul as to make obedience to God's law not only possible, but cheerful, consistent, and acceptable. Enforced, mechanically regulated obedience is unworthy of man and displeasing to God. The reality of a spiritually transformed nature is seen in a constant endeavour to observe the Divine "statutes and judgments and do them."

III. Is the only condition in which temporal prosperity can be truly

appreciated and safely enjoyed (vers. 28–30, 33–38). With the return of Israel to spiritual allegiance there is promised a return of temporal prosperity, and it is more than hinted in these verses that the outward prosperity should be proportioned to their moral obedience. Had they been more faithful, the promise of national restoration would have been more completely realised than history as yet has shown it to be. Temporal prosperity to the unbelieving is not only delusive, but dangerous. The success achieved by diligence and virtue has become a curse when the loss of rectitude has led to its abuse. The founders of the illustrious family of the Medici rose to affluence and power not only by their commercial genius, but by their philanthropy and virtue, John de Medici being honoured by his countrymen with the title of "the Father of the Poor;" and his son Cosmo has inscribed on his tomb the title of "Father of his country." But with the decline of virtue in their descendants wealth and prestige vanished. Spiritual prosperity is the precursor of temporal prosperity. We never properly enjoy the good things of this life but as we use them in the fear and love of God, the all-bountiful Giver.

IV. **Humbles the soul under a sense of personal unworthiness** (vers. 31, 32). 'Tis ever so. Nothing humbles the soul more than a display of God's condescending goodness. We are ashamed of the sins committed against beneficence so tender, so constant, so generous. We feel that such mercy is utterly undeserved. The goodness of God melts the heart into penitence, which a misconception of severity has hardened into indifference or reckless bravado (Rom. ii. 4, 5). A genuine repentance is one of the most hopeful symptoms of spiritual prosperity. The glory of Divine grace is often seen to best advantage through the mist of tears.

V. **Is secured by earnest and persevering prayer** (ver. 37). God had promised prosperity, and, apart from Israel's deservings, had determined to bestow it, but none the less must it be sought by prayer and supplication. Whatever God has promised is a legitimate subject for prayer. Prayer is the language of conscious dependence; but how vast is the scope of the suppliant which is limited only by "the exceeding great and precious promises!" Those blessings are most highly prized, and bring the greatest spiritual enrichment, which are secured by earnest and agonising prayer.

LESSONS.—1. *God has a definite purpose in giving or withholding prosperity.* 2. *Spiritual prosperity is the highest kind of prosperity.* 3. *The highest blessings are not secured without importunate prayer.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 22–24. The Divine Impartiality—1. An essential characteristic of the Divine nature. 2. Exercised in the accurate distribution of punishment and reward. 3. Reveals the enormity of human ingratitude and sin. 4. Vindicates the integrity of the Divine name. 5. Seen in the generous treatment of the undeserving. 6. A powerful motive to repentance and obedience.

Ver. 22. "It is not for any merit which God sees in His people that He has pity on them, for if God weighed their merits there could be nothing in them to recommend them to His favour; but it is in consideration of His own holy name and character as the God of covenanted grace, that so He may vindicate its sanctity before the nations from the reproach brought on it through the sins and the terrible punishment of the covenant people. Let us hence learn that the honour

of His own holy name is the first grand end of all God's dealings of wrath and mercy. Let us fall in with the purpose of God, and make the honour of His name our chief plea in our prayers for mercy and our influencing motive in all our acts."—*Fausset.*

— "**God's Motive in Salvation.** 1. Regard to His own glory. 2. In saving man for His own honour and glory God exhibits the mercy, holiness, love, and other attributes of the Godhead. 3. The doctrine that God is not moved to save man by any merit or worth in him is a truth of the highest importance to sinners. 4. It is as important for the saint as for the sinner to remember that he is not saved through personal merit, or for his own sake. 5. This doctrine, while it keeps the saint humble, will help to make him holy.

"Here, no ornament to park or garden, stands a dwarfed, stunted, bark-bound tree. How am I to develop that stem into tall and graceful beauty, to clothe with blossoms those naked branches and hang them till they bend with clustered fruit? Change such as that is not to be effected by surface-dressing, or any care bestowed on the upper soil. The remedy must go to the root. You cannot make that tree grow upwards till you break the crust below, pulverise the hard subsoil, and give the roots room and way to strike deeper down; for the deeper the root and the wider-spread the fine filaments of its rootlets, the higher the tree lifts an umbrageous head to heaven and throws out its hundred arms to catch, in dews, raindrops, and sunbeams, the blessings of the sky. The believer offers this analogy between grace and nature, that, as the tree grows best skyward that grows most downward, the lower the saint descends in humility the higher he rises in holiness. The soaring corresponds to the sinking."—*Guthrie's Gospel in Ezekiel.*

Vers. 23, 24. "**God Glorified in Redemption.** 1. God might have vindicated His honour and sanctified His name in our destruction. 2. God sanctifies His name and glorifies Himself in our redemption. 3. God's power, wisdom, holiness, justice, and mercy glorified in redemption. 4. In redemption God is glorified in the complete discomfiture of all His and our enemies.

"The effect of the wind is visible, not the element itself. The clouds scud across the sky, the trees swing their arms wildly in the air, aerial waves chase each other across the corn, and the boat, catching the gale in her flowing sheet, goes dancing over the billows. So, although in a sense infinitely higher, the Invisible is visible; and in His works we see One who, seeing all, remains Himself unseen. God is lost, not in darkness, but in light; a sun that blinds the eye which is turned on its burning disc. Angels themselves, unable to sustain His glory, cover their faces with their wings and use them, as a man his hand, to screen their eyes from the ineffable effulgence. Unbeliever though he was, the great Laplace, in one of his last and not least memorable utterances, said—'It is the little that we know; it is the great that remains unknown.' On the consecrated spot, where the cross of salvation rose and the blood of a Redeemer fell, I find the centre of a spiritual universe. Here, in a completed arch, if I may so speak, locked fast by the key, all the properties of divinity meet; here, concentrated as in a focus, its varied attributes blend and shine."—*Guthrie.*

Vers. 25–28. **Heart-Renewal** — 1. The work of the Divine Spirit. 2. Accomplished only by being cleansed from sin. 3. A thorough and self-conscious change. 4. Evidenced by an outward and practical obedience to the Divine law. 5. Puts the soul in its true relationship to God.

Ver. 25. "**The mention of clean water** to be sprinkled on the people as the means of purification can only be understood symbolically; it does not refer to any mere external rite, or

to any specific ordinance of the old covenant, such as the lustration ceremony with water and the ashes of the red heifer, or to the ablutions connected with the consecration of the Levites. It is rather to be viewed in reference to the purifications by water collectively, which were all, in one respect or another, symbolical of the removal of impurity and the establishment of the worshipper in a sound and acceptable condition. This was no more of a merely formal and outward character in Old Testament times than it is now, as we may learn from the whole tenor of this prophecy. It was by their *moral* pollutions most of all that the people of Israel had profaned God's name and drawn down His displeasure; and the purification which was to undo the evil and again to sanctify the name of God could be nothing short of a conformity to God's own righteousness, which throughout all ages is the same."—*Fairbairn.*

— **Man Justified.** "1. God's people are not chosen because they are holy. 2. In redemption, the saved are not justified by themselves, but by God. 3. We are not justified through the administration or efficacy of any outward ordinance. 4. We are justified, or cleansed from the guilt of sin, by the blood of Christ. The greatest of all questions, 'What must I do to be saved?' is one which admits of a short and plain answer. Capable of a wide expansion, it may yet be brought within a very narrow compass. The river, which there flows between distant wooded banks and yonder spreads itself out into a lake, reflecting on its mirror-face the bright heavens above and the dark hills around, is here—where its foaming waters flash past loud as thunder and quick as lightning, or creep sullenly along at the bottom of the deep, dark gorge — brought within narrow bounds; bounds so narrow that, with nerve enough, by one brave leap from rock to rock I could clear its breadth. Even so all the wide expanse of doctrines to be believed and duties to be done over which we might expatiate in reply to the question, 'What shall I do to be saved?' is contracted, compressed, comprehended in Paul's brief address—'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.' As salvation is the one thing needful for man, faith is the one thing needful for salvation."—*Guthrie.*

Ver. 26. **Man Converted.** "1. It is a great change—not a mere outward reformation. 2. It is a birth. 3. It is a resurrection. Our little child, watching with curious eye the apparent motion of objects, calls out in ecstasy and bids us see how hedge and house are flying past the carriage. You know it is not these that move; nor the fixed and firm shore, with its trees and fields, and boats at anchor, and harbours and headlands, that is gliding by the cabin-window. That is but an illusion of the eye; the motion is not in them but us."—*Guthrie.*

— **The Heart of Stone and the Heart of Flesh.** "I. *The heart of stone.* 1. Stone is cold. 2. Hard. 3. Dead. II. *The heart of flesh a new heart.* 1. By this change the understanding and judgment are enlightened. 2. The temper and disposition are changed and sanctified. 3. In conversion man gets a warm heart, a soft heart, a living heart. 4. By conversion man is ennobled. Near by a mass of rock that had fallen from the overhanging crag, which had some wild-flowers growing in its fissures and on its top the foxglove with its spikes of beautiful but deadly flowers, we once came upon an adder as it lay in ribbon-coil, basking on the sunny ground. At our approach the reptile stirred, uncoiled itself, and raising its head, with eyes like burning coals, it showed its venomous fangs, shook its cloven tongue, hissed, and gave sign of battle. Attacked, it retreated, and making for that grey stone, wormed itself into a hole in its side. Its nest and home were there. And in looking on that shattered rock, fallen from its primeval elevation, with its flowery but fatal charms, the home and nest of the adder, where nothing grew but poisoned beauty and nothing

dwelt but a poisoned brood, it seemed to us an emblem of that heart which the verse describes as a stone, which experience proves is a habitation of devils, and which the prophet pronounces to be desperately wicked."—*Guthrie.*

— "The heart of stone does not bear bending according to God's will, whereas the heart of flesh is soft and of such a texture that God can impress into its understanding a living knowledge, into its will a voluntary obedience, and into the inclinations a holy order."—*Starke.*

Ver. 27. **The New Life.** "I. *It is a willing obedience to the law of God.* II. *It is a progressive obedience.* 'I will cause you to walk in My statutes.' Other images convey the idea of progress, but this of progress achieved by exertion, progress the triumph of an intelligent mind and the reward of a determined will. 1. In this image God's people find comfort and encouragement. 2. This image stimulates to exertion. III. *This willing and progressive obedience is the sign and seal of salvation.* IV. *One of the most powerful means to accomplish the duty of the new life is to cultivate the love of Christ.* 1. Love is the most powerful of all motives. 2. Love is a motive to duty as pleasant as it is powerful. V. *A powerful motive to duty lies in the fact that by our obedience to these statutes the verdict of judgment shall be settled.* The last day is God's Day of settlement with a world that has had long credit. It is the winding-up of this earth's bankrupt estate and each man's individual interests. It is the closing of an open account that has been running on ever since the fall. It is the day when the balance is struck and our fate is heaven or hell. Our hands are now sowing seed for that great harvest."—*Guthrie.*

— "I will put My Spirit, the great principle of light, life, and love, within you, to actuate the new spirit and to influence the new affections and passions, that the animal spirit may not become brutish, that the mental powers become not foolish. I will put My Spirit within you, so that as the new spirit may influence the new heart, so will *My* Spirit influence *your* new spirit, that each may have a proper mover; and then all will be pure, regular, harmonious, when passion is influenced by reason and reason by the Holy Ghost. And the cause shall be evidenced by the effects; for I will cause you to walk in My statutes —not only to believe and reverence My appointments relative to what I command you to perform; but ye shall walk in them, your conduct shall be regulated by them."—*A. Clarke.*

— "First the inward and then the outward change is God's order, while we men always proceed in the reverse order. What good a man does is not his, but God's work in him."—*Starke.*

Ver. 28. "To the heavenly among men there is no lack even on earth; to him who has what alone is worth having nothing shall be wanting."—*Lange.*

Vers. 29–36. "Spiritual blessings were largely comprised in their temporal ones, as the kernel is enclosed in the shell. Hence Christian holiness and all the blessings of the new covenant are here principally implied. The Jews looked for the bringing-in of a better hope. They had a laver in which they washed; but David says, 'I will wash my hands in innocency.' They had the blood of sprinkling, but a better fountain was expected to be opened for sin and for uncleanness. They had circumcision; but the true circumcision was that of the heart. They had the law written on the tables of stone; but the Messiah who says, 'Thy law is within Me,' here promises to write it on the heart."—*Sutcliffe.*

Vers. 29, 30. **The Productiveness of Nature**—1. *A Divine gift.* "I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field." 2. *Promptly responds to the Divine voice.* "I will call for the corn and increase it." 3. *A guarantee against famine.* "I will

lay no famine upon you—ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen." 4. *Is appreciated only by those who are morally cleansed.* "I will save you from all your uncleannesses."

Ver. 29. "'I will call for the corn.' All necessaries for aliment comprised in one, and these brought to them at God's call, which they will hear (Ps. cv. 16, 40; Heb. ii. 21, 22). Famine is God's arrow; He shoots it; where it is, He layeth it; but His people shall neither have it their misery nor their reproach any more."—*Pool.*

Ver. 31–36. "Nothing so melts the sinner into repentance as the love and grace of God, where he could have looked only for wrath because of his sins. Let us, if we desire true repentance, receive it as the gift of God at the foot of the cross of Christ, where we see our sin forgiven at the cost of such an awful sacrifice, flowing from the gratuitous love of God. The terrors of the law can frighten, but the grace of God in Christ alone can melt the heart."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 31, 32. **Conscious Sin**—1. *The result of reflection on personal wrong-doing.* "Then shall ye remember your evil ways and your doings that were not good." 2. *Humbles the soul in profound self-abasement.* "Ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways." 3. *Convinces the soul that all blessings have a Divine source.* "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God."

Ver. 31. "When I have given you My Spirit, renewed your hearts, brought you by miraculous mercy out of captivity in a strange land unto liberty in your own, ye shall call to mind, review and examine all your past life, your ways opposite to God's, therefore both their own by choice and also evil in their very nature. Your mind shall abhor what you loved and deeply grieve at what you rejoiced in. When swine ye wallowed in mire; when made sheep you shall as much fear and flee from it."—*Pool.*

— "There are some things we can hardly forget—our sorrows and our pleasures, as Esau; some things we can hardly remember—our faults and our friends, as Joseph's butler. Augustine was famous for two of his works—his 'Retractions,' which are the confessions of his errors; and his 'Confessions,' which are the retractions of his life."—*Trapp.*

— "In conversion man regains his memory. Loathing is not a sign of sickness only, but in matters spiritual it is a sign of convalescence. Our life must become sorrow to us, otherwise sorrow will not become life to us."—*Lange.*

Ver. 32. "Grace works shame, and so much the more as it makes the wilderness a paradise, the beggar a king, and the sinner a priest. We boast of nothing in Christ and we boast of all things."—*Lange.*

Vers. 33–36. **Moral Reform**—1. The basis of temporal prosperity. 2. Can be accomplished only by Divine power. 3. An evidence to the world of the Divine veracity.

Ver. 36. "'I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.' **The Security of the Believer.** 1. The text announces a most important truth. 2. This truth imparts comfort to a true Christian. Through his confidence in this truth—(1) he commits all his earthly cares to God; (2) he is sustained amid the trials of life; (3) he cheerfully hopes and patiently waits for heaven. 3. Both nature and providence illustrate the truth of the text. The voice of every storm that, like an angry child, weeps and cries itself to sleep, the voice of every shower that has cleared up into sunshine, the hoarse voice of ocean breaking in impotent rage against its ancient bounds, the voice of the seasons as they have marched to the music of the spheres in un-

broken succession over the earth, the scream of the satyr in Babylon's empty halls, the fierce shout of the Bedouin as he hurls his spear and careers in freedom over his desert sands, the wail and weeping of the wandering Jew over the ruins of Zion—in all these I hear the echo of this voice of God—'I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it.'"—*Guthrie.*

Ver. 37, 38. **An Increasing Population**—1. An evidence of national prosperity. 2. A great national responsibility. 3. Should be instructed in the knowledge and worship of God. 4. An imposing spectacle when engaged in the praise and service of God.

Ver. 37. "Thus saith the Lord God." **The Divine Word**—1. Emphasised by frequent repetition. This the fourteenth time this expression is used in the present chapter. 2. The foundation and guarantee of blessing to man. 3. Should be devoutly pondered. 4. Is infallible alike in promise and threatening.

— "'I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.' **The Nature, Necessity, and Power of Prayer.** 1. Nature herself teaches us to pray. 2. Some difficulties connected with the duty. The decrees of God render prayer unnecessary. From want of faith prayer must be useless. 3. Prayer must be earnest. 4. Prayer is powerful. 5. Prayer is confident. Child of God, pray on. By prayer thy hand can touch the stars, thy arm stretches up to heaven. Nor let thy holy boldness be dashed by the thought that prayer has no power to bend these skies and bring down thy God. When I pull upon the rope which fastens my little skiff to a distant and mighty ship, this feeble arm may not draw its vast bulk to me, but I draw myself to it, to ride in safety under protection of its guns, and in my want enjoy the fulness of its stores. And it equally serves my purpose and supplies my needs that, although prayer were powerless to move God to me, it moves me to God. If He does not descend to earth I ascend to heaven."—*Guthrie.*

— "For all these blessings, whether of sanctification or of millennial glory, God will be enquired of in prayer; for the duty and the promise are everywhere connected in the sacred writings. It is remarkable that when St. Paul mentions holiness of heart at large, it is generally with the most fervent supplications for its attainment (Eph. iii. 14–19; 1 Thess. v. 23). This is still the only way for men to attain purity of heart and the mind of Christ."—*Sutcliffe.*

Ver. 38. "Thus shall men multiply and fill the cities of replanted Judah. And the increase of the numbers of a people is then honourable when they are all dedicated to God as a holy flock, to be presented to Him as living sacrifices. Crowds are a lovely sight in God's temple."—*Benson.*

— "Such promises as those contained in this chapter cannot be taken in an absolute sense; they must be understood to some extent conditionally. They reveal the kind propensions of God towards His people, what He is disposed and ready to do towards them, rather than what He will for certain accomplish at any stage or period of their history. So far the Word contains an absolute element, as God certainly pledges Himself to make provision for securing, in a larger measure than formerly, a proper regeneration of heart and conduct in His people, and also for giving palpable proof of this in their more flourishing and prosperous condition generally. The goodness of God was certainly to manifest itself for these ends; but it would do so to the full extent represented only if they continued in His goodness."—*Fairbairn.*

— "There is no period of the Jewish history from that time until now to which this beautiful chapter can be applied. It must belong to the Gospel dispensation; and if the Jews will still refuse, contradict, and blas-

pheme, let no Christian have any fellowship with them in their opposition to this Almighty Saviour. Let none be indifferent to His salvation, let all plead His promises, and let the messengers of the Churches proclaim to the Christian world a free, a full, and a present salvation."—*A. Clarke.*

The Vision of the Dry Bones Revivified a Symbol of the Death and Resurrection of Israel. (Chap. xxxvii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"The hand of the Lord was upon me."** "The abrupt commencement without *and*, points out that the fact here related is extraordinary and out of connection with the usual prophetic activity. The hand of the Lord denotes the overruling Divine influence."—*Hengstenberg.* **"The valley"**—"the plain or valley near Tel Abib, familiar to Ezekiel as the scene of the vision of the cherubim. Now, however, to his horror, he found it full of dry, withering bones—the wreck of a vast host slain by the sword. Wandering over the wide expanse, the multitude of these ghastly relics of mortality and their bleached dryness, the very embodiment of death, filled him with awe."—*Geikie.*

Ver. 3. **"Can these bones live?"** "Implying that, humanly speaking, they could not; but faith leaves the question of possibility to rest with God, with whom nothing is impossible (Deut. xxxii. 39). An image of Christian faith which believes in the coming resurrection of the dead, in spite of all appearances against it, because God has said it (John v. 21; Rom. iv. 17; 2 Cor. i. 9)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 4. **"Prophesy upon these bones"**—prophesy *over* them; proclaim God's quickening word to them.

Ver. 6. **"Ye shall know that I am the Lord"**—"by the actual proof of My Divinity which I will give in reviving Israel."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 7. **"And as I prophesied there was a noise."** God's voice of power is followed by a rustling caused by the bones coming rustling up from the surface of the valley."—*Lange.*

Ver. 8. **"The sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them; but there was no breath in them."** "So far, they were only cohering in order as unsightly skeletons. The next step, that of covering them successively with sinews, skin, and flesh, gives them beauty; but still no breath of life in them. This may imply that Israel hereafter, as at the restoration from Babylon was the case in part, shall return to Judea unconverted at first (Zech. xiii. 8, 9). Spiritually a man may assume all the semblances of spiritual life, yet have none, and so be dead before God."—*Fausset.* "There is reference to the first creation of man. There also the lower element comes first into being, then the higher. The prophet is penetrated with the thought that the real misery of the people is the moral ruin. The remedy, therefore, cannot stop at the restoration of the civic state. The main thing is a renewed outpouring of the Spirit and the restoration of union with God thereby effected, which was originally accomplished by God breathing into man the breath of life."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 9. **"Prophesy unto the wind"**—the spirit of life, or life-breath. For it is distinct from "the four winds" from which it is summoned. *Lange* says what is here spoken of is—the universal spirituality which pervades all creation. The Spirit is evidently here referred to under the symbol of the wind. His influence is supreme and operates in all parts of the earth.

Ver. 10. **"So I prophesied, and the**

breath came into them"—such honour God gives to the Divine word even in the mouth of a man: how much more when in the mouth of the Son of God! (John v. 25–29). Though this chapter does not directly prove the resurrection of the dead, it does so indirectly, for it takes for granted the future fact as one recognised by believing Jews, and so made the image of their national restoration (Isa. xxv. 8; xxvi. 10; Dan. xii. 2; Hosea vi. 2; xiii. 14).

Ver. 11. "**Our bones are dried.**" "We are undone"—*Gesenius.* "Reduced to ourselves"—*Hitzig.* "It is over with us"—*Delitzsch.* "We are cut off for us. The *for us* points out how grievous the sad fact is for those concerned, how painfully they were affected by it"—*Hengstenberg.* There is nothing in us to give hope, like a withered branch cut off from a tree, or a limb from the body. The national state was as hopeless of revival as marrowless bones of reanimation. "Cut off," separated, shut out from God's help.

Ver. 12. "**I will open your graves**"—the abodes of the exile, since the Jews who were in exile considered themselves like dead men.

Ver. 14. "**And shall put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live.**" "The inspiriting and quickening for a home system which is to have permanence, and especially in the case of a people like Israel, will of necessity be spiritual and religious (Isa. xiv. 1; chap. xvii. 24; xxii. 14; xxxvi. 36)."—*Lange.* "Wherever within the Christian Church a new state of death arises, there this prophecy always comes again into force, until at the end of days death be fully overcome."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 16. "**Take thee one stick**"—alluding to Num. xvii. 2, the tribal rod. The union of the two rods was a prophecy in action of the brotherly union which is to reunite the ten tribes and Judah. As their severance under Jeroboam was fraught with the greatest evil to the covenant people, so the first result of both being joined by the Spirit of life to God is, they become joined together under the one Covenant King, Messiah — David.—"**Write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions**"—his associates: *i.e.*, For Judah and, besides Benjamin and Levi, those who had joined themselves to him of Ephraim, Manasseh, Simeon, Ashur, Zebulun, Issachar, as having the temple and lawful priesthood in his borders (2 Chron. xi. 12, 13, 16; xv. 9; xxx. 11, 18). The latter became identified with Judah after the carrying away of the ten tribes, and returned with Judah from Babylon, and so shall be associated with that tribe at the future restoration. "**Then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions.**" "Ephraim's posterity took the lead, not only of the other descendants of Joseph, but of the ten tribes of Israel. For 400 years, during the period of the Judges, with Manasseh and Benjamin, its dependent tribes, it had formerly taken the lead: Shiloh was its religious capital, Shechem its civil capital. God had transferred the birthright from Reuben, for dishonouring his father's bed, to Joseph, whose representative his son Ephraim, though younger than his brother Manasseh, was made by his grandfather Jacob (Gen. xlviii. 19; 1 Chron. v. 1). From the pre-eminence of Ephraim, Israel is attached to him as companions. The 'all' in this case, not in that of Judah, which has attached as companions only *some* of the children of Israel, implies that the *bulk* of the ten tribes did not return at the restoration from Babylon, but is and shall continue distinct from Judah until the coming union at the restoration."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 19. "**And they shall be one in mine hand.**" "The interpretation keeps firm hold of the symbolic action—the union by and in God, as opposed to the separation by and in Ephraim."—*Lange.*

Ver. 22. "**I will make them one nation.**" The now plainly expressed signification of the stick: the one nation will be one kingdom. "**And one king shall be king to them all.**" "Not Zerubbabel, who was not a king either in fact or name, and who ruled over but a few Jews, and that only for a few years, whereas the king here reigns for ever. **Messiah** is meant (chap. xxxiv. 23, 24). The union of Judah and Israel under King Messiah symbolises the union of Jews and Gentiles under Him, partly now, perfectly hereafter (ver. 24; John x. 16)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 23. "**Neither shall they defile themselves with idols.**" "Since sin, and especially idolatry, had contributed to the separation spoken of, the discourse turns to that. The worship of idols is localised transgression."—*Lange.*

Ver. 24. "**David My servant shall be king over them.**" See note on ver. 22.

Ver. 25. "**They shall dwell therein for ever**" (Isa. lx. 21; Joel iii. 20; Amos ix. 15).

Ver. 26. "**I will make a covenant of peace**"—better than the old legal covenant, because an unchangeable covenant of grace (chap. xxxiv. 25; Isa. lv. 3; Jer. xxxii. 40). Will guarantee them security from all hostile enemies. "**And I will place them.**" "God now Himself orders and determines everything concerning them—sets them, in opposition to their former fluctuating, because self-ordered, condition."—*Fairbairn.* "**I will set My sanctuary in the midst of them.**" The essence of the sanctuary is the presence of God among them.

Ver. 28. "**The heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel.**" "This separation and preference, this marking-off from the profane world, which constitutes the idea of sanctification, follows from this, that God's sanctuary is in Israel, that He dwells among them with all the fulness of His blessings and gifts. The natural consequence of this recognition compelled by facts is, that the heathen seek for admittance among this people."—*Hengstenberg.*

HOMILETICS.

The Resuscitation of an Effete Nation.

(Vers. 1–14.)

In this paragraph we have another example of the bold and startling imagery familiar to the genius of Ezekiel, and of his vivid insight into the possibilities of Divine power. To his realising faith the bleached and desiccated skeletons of the valley are a formidable army of living and moving forces. The conception of the resurrection of the dead on so vast a scale indicates a remarkable advance in that age of the revelation of what God can do for His people. Observe—

I. **That the resuscitation of an effete nation seems a physical impossibility.** 1. *The nation is lifeless and hopeless* (ver. 1, 2). The skeletons are dislocated and scattered; the bones are very dry and crumbling into dust. Though not actually buried, they are slowly burying themselves in their progressive decay. The evidence of death is complete. It is beyond the power of any known physical law to breathe the ghastly fragments into life. A nation, or an individual, so utterly defunct seems beyond the possibility of recovery. Saith the proverb, "*From privation to possession there is no return.*" Well might Israel say, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off from our parts" (ver. 11). 2. *Its resurrection not impossible to God*

(ver. 3). If Ezekiel had been asked the question by any other than Jehovah, "Can these bones live?" he would have promptly answered, "No; it is impossible." It is beyond the reach of human philosophy to put life into dry bones, and it passes the wit of human politics to restore a captive and scattered nation. But the prophet had already learned not to limit the power of God, and he reverently and falteringly answered, "Lord, Thou knowest:" if it can be done and is to be done, Thou alone must do it. All things are possible to God. His power is limited only by His will.

II. **That the resuscitation of an effete nation is accomplished only by Divine power.** 1. *By Divine power working through authorised human agency* (vers. 4–8). The prophet was directed to prophesy over the bones; the terms of the message were put into his lips, and the results of his preaching were Divinely indicated to him. He obeyed the Divine mandate; he preached; the silent valley rustled and rattled with the noise of bone fitting into bone, and while he gazed there grew as from the soil an innumerable mass of perfected human forms. But here the limitation of human agency, even when acting under Divine supervision, is plainly indicated. The bodies were prone and lifeless: "there was no breath in them." While startled and terrified at the effect of his words, as if an army of Frankensteins had been summoned from the dust, the prophet felt his own utter helplessness. He was powerless to advance the development a single step further. It was an experience that is often familiar to the earnest preacher. He may sway his audience with his impassioned eloquence till they are roused into boisterous enthusiasm or dissolved in tears; but there his power ends. To create a moral and spiritual change is beyond his province. It is said that on one occasion, when Chrysostom was greeted by his congregation with a storm of delighted applause because of his overwhelming eloquence, he besought them with tears to forget the preacher and look to God, who alone can renew the heart and reform the life. 2. *By the direct inspiration of the Divine breath* (vers. 9, 10). Life is the breath of God. Still, under Divine direction, the prophet invokes the help of the life-giving Spirit. A mysterious breath passes over the prostrate forms; they move and leap to their feet, "an exceeding great army." The Spirit that renews the face of the earth, robing it with velvet verdure and decorating it with nodding flowers, can alone raise the dead to life and adorn the soul with spiritual beauty. A lady who recently visited the Fijian Archipelago writes:—"As I lived for two years in the midst of this kindly, courteous people, and marked the reverent devoutness of their lives and the simple earnestness of their bearing at the never-failing morning and evening family worship and frequent church services, I found it hard to believe the facts related to me by reliable eye-witnesses of the appalling scenes of carnage, fighting, human sacrifices, debasing idolatry, and loathsome cannibal feasts which five, ten, or fifteen years previously formed the incidents of daily life in districts where now English ladies and their children may travel or settle in perfect security." What had wrought this change? The breath of the Divine Spirit had blown through those lovely islands and transformed the moral wastes.

III. **That the resuscitation of an effete nation is a suggestive revelation of the Divine character** (vers. 11–14). 1. *That God alone has absolute power over life and death.* It is the vanity of man to set too high a value upon his own works. He imagines he can work out his own regeneration; but when he touches the mysterious edge of life and death he is baffled and compelled to confess his helplessness. It is the solitary and incommunicable prerogative of the Godhead to educe life out of death. The supreme greatness of God is evidenced in the exercise of His resurrection power. 2. *That the nations should*

learn to acknowledge and adore the true God. "Ye shall know that I am the Lord: that I the Lord have spoken it and performed it" (vers. 13, 14). The deities of the heathen could do nothing for their votaries, either to prevent their ruin or to rescue them from it. There is but one living and true God, and the only hope of moral revival and salvation for humanity is in Him. "Thou hast made us for Thyself," wrote Augustine, "and our hearts can have no rest until they rest in Thee."

LESSONS.—1. *The nation that ignores God must perish.* 2. *One nation is Divinely favoured that other nations may be blessed.* 3. *God will be glorified either in the rise or fall of nations.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–14. "Seized by the hand of the Spirit, Ezekiel is borne aloft. He is carried away through mid-air and set down in a lonely valley among the hills of a distant land. At some former period it appears to have been the scene of a great battle. There hosts had sustained the charge of hosts, and crowns perhaps were staked and won. The peace of these solitudes had been rudely broken by the shrieks of the wounded, the wild shouts of the victors, the clash of arms, and the savage roar of war. It was silent, calm now. The storm was down; but the tempest that swept over it had left it strewn with wrecks. The dead had been left unburied. They mouldered where they fell, the skull rattled in the cloven helmet, the sword of the warrior lay rusting beside his skeleton, and the handle was still in the relaxed grasp of the bony fingers. On these unsepulchred corpses the birds of the air had summered and the wild beasts of the field had wintered. The rain had washed and the sun had bleached the bones which the ravens had picked bare—they were white and dry. In these grim and ghastly skeletons a doleful picture of death was spread out before the prophet. In all the scene which he surveyed there was neither sign nor sound of life, but, it may be, the croak of the raven, the howl of the famished wolf, or the echo of his own solitary footfall. Here Ezekiel was standing, a lonely man, amid the mouldering dead, when a voice made him start. It came from the skies, charged with the strange question—'Son of man, can these bones live?' So soon as, after addressing the bones, the prophet addresses his God, there came from heaven a living, life-giving breath. It blows down the valley, and as, in passing, it kisses the icy lips of the dead, and stirs their hair and fans their cheek, man after man springs to his feet, until the field which Ezekiel found covered with ghastly skeletons is crowded with a mighty army, all armed for battle and war—the marshalled host of God."—*Guthrie.*

— "There can be no reasonable doubt as to the leading scope and purpose of this remarkable vision. It is intended to counteract the feeling of despair which had succeeded to the opposite one of carnal security and presumptuous confidence which at an earlier period had wrought so disastrously among the people. Now that they were reduced to so hapless and shattered a condition, the glowing delineations the prophet had been drawing of a happy future seemed as visionary to their minds as formerly had appeared his dark forebodings of impending distress and ruin. They felt as if they had become like bones dried and scattered at the grave's mouth, and destitute of everything on which they could build any reasonable prospect of restored felicity. The prophet therefore meets them on their own ground. He admits that, as compared with the elevated prospects he had been unfolding, they were in themselves no better than lifeless skeletons, but at the same time shows that even this could raise no barrier against the realisation of the better future, since

they had to do with the word of Him who is equally able to make alive as to kill. And it must have been impossible for any thoughtful and pious Israelite to enter into the application made of this vision to the temporal resuscitation of Israel's prostrate condition, without perceiving how it also involved, for all true believers, the future resurrection of their bodies from the power of death."—*Fairbairn.*

— "Besides the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, this vision is a lively representation of a threefold resurrection. 1. Of the resurrection of souls from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, to a holy, heavenly, spiritual, and Divine life by the power of Divine grace accompanying the word of Christ (John v. 24, 25). 2. The resurrection of the Gospel Church, or any part of it, from an afflicted state to liberty and peace. 3. The resurrection of the body at the great day, especially the bodies of believers, to life eternal."—*Benson.*

Ver. 1–10. **Lessons from the Valley of Vision.** "1. *The text presents us with a picture of the spiritual state of our race* —'dead in trespasses and sins.' 2. *With an illustration of the human instrumentality God generally employs in the work of quickening the dead in sin*—the preaching of the Gospel. 3. *With a view of the Divine agency employed in the work of quickening the dead in trespasses and sins*—the power of the Holy Spirit."—*T. D. Anderson, B.A.*

— **The Secret of Successful Preaching and True Revival.** "1. *The first thing necessary is a Divinely appointed sphere.* The prophet had to speak his message in a particular place. One reason why men are not successful to-day is because they are not where God designed them to be. Not ministers simply, but Christian men in business, for secular professions are as much in God's hands as religious ones. 2. *A second requirement is contact with the misery to be removed.* The prophet was not commanded to stand a great distance off and proclaim his message. 'The Spirit of the Lord set him down in the midst of the valley and caused him to pass by them round about,' and thus he was brought into close contact with his work. We must not say, 'The people must come up to us;' we must go down to them, sympathise with them, identify ourselves with them. 3. *The next requirement is confidence in God* (ver. 3). 4. *A fourth requirement is an inspired message* (vers. 4–6). We ought always to listen for what God says; and if the vision tarry we should agonise in prayer—'Lord, tell us what to say and how to say it.' 5. *There must be a willingness to declare the message given.* 'So I prophesied as I was commanded.' 6. *When all these requirements are met, the result must be a manifestation of Divine power.* We have, in the mode in which this power was manifested, the indication of a true revival. It is gradual. There was (1.) an effect produced. 'There was a noise.' (2.) The effect became visible. 'Behold a shaking.' (3.) The visible effect took a particular form. 'The bones came together,' &c. (4.) The Holy Ghost came down and life is given. 'The breath came into them, and they lived and stood up on their feet.'"—*The Lay Preacher.*

— **Spiritual Resurrection.** "1. *The condition of the world.* (1.) Spiritually dead—'Bones.' (2.) Hopelessly so—'Dry bones.' (3.) Universally so—'A valley full.' 2. *The means for its recovery.* (1.) A Divine appointment—preaching. (2.) The claim of attention. (3.) The offer of salvation. 3. *The wonderful result.* (1.) The Gospel is accompanied by Divine power. (2.) The Spirit is essential to complete success. (3.) In the use of the means success is certain."—*Pulpit Analyst.*

Vers. 1, 2. **In the Presence of Death.** 1. A humbling spectacle. 2. A solemn reminder of our own mortality. 3. An occasion of sorrow. 4. We see the superficiality of all things earthly. 5. We are taught the necessity of a moral and spiritual preparedness. 6. Find our true consolation in the loving and eternal God.

Ver. 1. "This valley is found indeed everywhere. In other words, Is there not plenty of dead bones? The best thing is, that God still cares even for such."—*Lange.*

Ver. 2. "As Christ often improved His miracles by a spiritual turn of thought, so we may improve this astonishing restoration of the Jews to illustrate the conversion of sinners. Man in his fallen state is dead in trespasses and sins; he has lost the life of God. He is dry and parched, for in his flesh dwelleth no good thing. He has lain a long time in that most piteous situation, so that he is not only dry, but with man there is no hope of his conversion. The calamity is not solitary but universal—'Behold there were very many in the open valley.' To raise and recover fallen man, ministers must not only be impelled with the spirit of faith and love, but they must mix among the wicked, as the physicians with the sick. We may stay in our closets learning our Master's wisdom till we neglect to do our Master's work. We must mix among the dry bones, watch their passions, trace their habits, and learn their evasions of conscience and of the Gospel. Ministers must not despair, though the cases may seem hopeless."—*Sutcliffe.*

Ver. 3. "O Lord, Thou knowest." **Human Perplexity**—1. Finds refuge in the Divine omniscience. 2. Reverently acknowledges the illimitableness of the Divine power. 3. Teaches the soul to render unquestioning obedience to the Divine command.

— "The Russians in a difficult question are accustomed to answer—'God and our great Duke know all this.'"—*Trapp.*

— "Since God is omniscient and omnipotent, the resurrection of the dead is possible; but since He has also promised it and cannot break His word, it is also certain (John v. 25)."—*Starke.*

Ver. 4. "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." **An Urgent Message.** Addressed—1. To a dead nationality. 2. To a dead Church. 3. To a dead faith. 4. To dead souls.

Ver. 5. "Neither need the resurrection of the dead be held a thing incredible concerning God's power and truth (Acts xxvi. 8). The keeping green of Noah's olive-tree in the time of the flood, the blossoming of Aaron's dry rod, the flesh and sinews coming to these dry bones and the breath entering into them, what were they all but so many lively emblems of the resurrection?"—*Trapp.*

Ver. 6. "Sinews tie the bones together. Flesh fills up the hollownesses, and being full of muscles, helps motion. Skin, as the upper silken garment, covers all with a clear and blushing colour. Breath lastly must be added. All this God declares He will do."—*Pool.*

Vers. 7–10. **The Successful Preacher**—1. Is Divinely commissioned. 2. Is careful to declare only the message God reveals to Him. "So I prophesied as I was commanded" (vers. 7, 10). 3. Recognises the necessity of prayer for the inspiration of the Spirit. "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain" (ver. 9). 4. Is honoured in seeing the fruit of his labours. "The breath came into them, and they lived" (ver. 10).

— "Three degrees or processes have been remarked in this mystic vision. When the prophet was commanded to prophesy, to foretell, on the authority of God, that there should be a restoration to their own land—1. There was a noise, which was followed by a general shaking, during which the bones became arranged and united. 2. The flesh and skin came upon them, so that the dry bones were no longer seen. 3. The spirit or soul came into them, and they stood up perfectly vivified. Perhaps these might be illustrated by three periods of time which marked the regeneration of the Jewish polity:—1. The publication of the edict

of Cyrus in behalf of the Jews, which caused a general shaking or stir among the people, so that the several families began to approach each other and prepare for their return to Judea (Ezra i. 2, 3). But though partially restored, they were obliged to discontinue the rebuilding of the Temple. 2. The edict published by Darius in the second year of his reign (Ezra iv. 23, 24), which removed the impediments thrown in the way of the Jews (Ezra vi. 6, 7). 3. The mission of Nehemiah with orders from Artaxerxes to complete the building of the Temple and the city (Neh. ii. 7). Then the Jews became a great army, and found themselves in sufficient force to defend themselves and city from all their enemies."—*A. Clarke.*

— "The vision secondarily sets forth the spiritual resurrection of the people of God now through the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost; and then hereafter their literal resurrection also, through the same Spirit (Rom. viii. 11; Phil. iii. 20). It needs the same Almighty power to raise a sinner from his natural state of spiritual death as it does to raise a corpse to life. To man both alike are impossible. But faith believes in the power and will of God to quicken the dead where to sense the case would seem hopeless. The spiritual resurrection is not instantaneously complete, but is progressive. At first there is the outward and inward preparation for the reception of the Spirit of life, and then at last the breath of life enters the man, and he becomes truly born again of the Spirit. Let us never be satisfied with the outward semblances of spiritual life—the bones, sinews, flesh, and skin—which give the *form* of beauty and life, but which are not the *life* itself. None but living believers shall stand before the living God. Prayer is the means whereby to obtain the breath of spiritual life, both for ourselves and for others (ver. 9; Sol. Song iv. 16)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 7. "If the voice of the Holy Ghost is heard in the heart, then there is a movement of the heart, and blessed is he who obeys the impulse."—*Starck.*

Ver. 8. "The spirit and not the uniform is that which truly unifies, and the consciences of men are not to be dealt with as the regimental tailor deals with soldiers."—*Lange.*

Ver. 9. "When ministers succeed in promoting a law-work on the mind, always in due time mixing comfort with terror, they must turn their eyes to heaven and become advocates and intercessors for the promised Comforter. Our sermons have too much of the didactic; we divide, explain, and teach. We dwell on words and truths already understood. But after setting good things before an audience, why may we not assist piety in uttering the wishes of their hearts to obtain them? The frequent prayers which St. Paul mixes with his discourses are the most pathetic and touching parts of his writings."—*Sutcliffe.*

— "Vision of the Dry Bones—a theme for a missionary sermon. 1. *A striking description of the religious state of the heathen world.* (1.) The persons made the subject of this prophetic vision are represented as dead. (2.) The number of the dead forms another part of the picture—'the valley was full of bones.' (3.) They were unburied. The destructive effects of sin, the sad ravages of death, lay exposed and open to the sun. (4.) The state of the dead—'the bones were very dry.' Under this strong figure the hopelessness of their condition is represented. 2. *The means by which its mystical resurrection is to be effected.* (1.) The ministry of the Word is the grand means appointed by God for the salvation of the world. (2.) The words may be considered as an injunction on the preachers of the Gospel—'Prophesy unto these dry bones.' (3.) The injunction 'Prophesy' respects not only ministers, but you also who have a private station in the Church. 3. *The certain success which should follow the application of the appointed means.* (1.) Our confidence rests on the power

of the Gospel. (2.) Our confidence in the certain success of the Gospel rests also on experience. (3.) Prophecy confirms the certainty of success."—*R. Watson.*

Ver. 10. "'An exceeding great army.' A power, or army of strong, courageous, and well-ordered soldiers. The phrase in the Hebrew is very full,—a power, or great host, very, very great. Thus they rise that the prophet and we might know how safe they would be in themselves, and how terrible to their enemies."—*Pool.*

Vers. 11–14. National Life—1. Dependent on God for its worth and permanence. 2. Sinks into decay and oblivion when it ignores God. 3. Indebted for its revival to the goodness and power of God.

Ver. 11. "'Our hope is lost.' Let them hope as hope can: we have hanged up all our hopes now that the city and Temple are destroyed. Thus carnal confidence, as it riseth up into a corky, frothy hope when it seeth sufficient help, so it sitteth down into a faithless, sullen discontent and despair when it can see no second causes."—*Trapp.*

— The language of unbelief makes the calamity great, and God's power to help little.

Vers. 12, 13. "Though your captivity be as death, your prisons and confinements close as the grave, yet I will open those graves. I will lift you out, lend you a hand to bring you out with life and strength. And I will be your guide, that you may know the way; be your support, that you may be able to go; and your guard and defence against dangers of the way, that you may certainly come into your own land. When your restitution to your own land and your prosperity in it, when your growth to strength and power shall be so miraculously effected, then you shall acknowledge and publish the glory of My power, faithfulness, goodness, and wisdom."—*Pool.*

HOMILETICS.

The Unity of the Kingdom of God.

(Vers. 15–28.)

I. Promoted by the blending of hostile nationalities into a universal brotherhood (vers. 15–22). We have here another example of the realism of Ezekiel's method of teaching. By the bringing together of two separate rods, or sceptres, till they appeared as one in the hand of the prophet, he illustrated the approaching union of the rival kingdoms of Judah and Israel. The misfortunes of the past had been intensified by the rupture of the kingdom of David. Internecine wars had weakened both North and South and left the exhausted tribes an easy prey to the heathen invaders. The removal of the ten tribes into Assyrian exile more than a century and a half before toned down the bitterness of ancient animosities in the breasts of the two tribes still left in the land; and when they, in their turn, suffered the miseries of exile, a spirit of brotherhood was awakened among all the tribes, and they yearned for the time when they should again become a united nation. The prophets no less than the people looked forward to this desirable consummation. They saw that the fires of affliction were already fusing the broken and scattered elements into a strongly welded national unity. But in the wider scope of the prophetic vision, the union of Israel and Judah was regarded as a type of the future union of all nations in the universal kingdom of Messiah. In the march of the centuries and the advancement of knowledge the nations are being drawn closer to each

other; war, hatred, and jealousy will ultimately disappear, and peace and righteousness everywhere prevail:—

"O scenes surpassing fable, and yet true,
Scenes of accomplished bliss! Which who can see,
Though but in distant prospect, and not feel
His soul refreshed with foretaste of the joy?
Antipathies are none. In the heart
No passion touches a discordant string,
But all is harmony and love."—*Cowper.*

II. **Acknowledges the supreme authority of the one Divine King.** "I will make them one nation, and one king shall be king to them all. David My servant shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd. My servant David shall be their prince for ever" (vers. 22–25). It was plainly revealed that the coming Messiah-King was to be a descendant of David, the Jewish hero, and both prophets and people expected that he would restore the kingdom on the lines of its ancient constitution, for they knew nothing higher. The conception of a purely spiritual kingdom was altogether beyond the range of human thought, and was not dreamed of till proclaimed by the lips of our Lord. Even then the idea was but slowly comprehended by the best-instructed Jewish minds; and the rejection of the true Messiah by the bulk of the Jewish nation shows how unwilling or incapable they were to take in the sublime notion. It is only by the light of the New Testament that a later age has been able to realise the far-reaching significance of the prophetic vision. The true Israel is not a political but a spiritual community, gathered out of all nations under heaven, compacted and unified into a spiritual kingdom, acknowledging and serving one Divine Ruler, who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

III. **Established by the Divinely imparted righteousness of its subjects** (vers. 23, 24). Sin disintegrates and scatters, as the chequered history of the Jewish nation proves. But the stability and permanent unity of the Messianic kingdom will be ensured in the fact that it is built up and established in righteousness. It is composed of sanctified natures from which the enfeebling defilement of iniquity will be cleansed, and the changed lives of its subjects will be evidenced in practical holiness. "They shall walk in My judgments, and observe My statutes and do them." It is:—

"The kingdom of established peace,
Which can no more remove;
The perfect power of godliness,
The omnipotence of love."

IV. **Confirmed by a perpetual covenant** (vers. 26, 27). The terms of the covenant have a Divine origin and sanction—"I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Here is the guarantee of its inviolability. Had it rested on political or any human considerations, it would have been insecure. God is ever faithful to His part of the covenant, notwithstanding the infidelity and ingratitude of His people. It is, moreover, a covenant of *peace*—the moral breach occasioned by sin is healed by pardon and reconciliation through the intervention of Messiah, who by His offered and accepted sacrifice has made it possible to subdue the inveterate enmity of the human heart and bring man into spiritual union with God. The reality and perpetuity of the covenant are assured by the abiding presence of God with His people. "I will set up My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore." The unity of the Divine kingdom will be maintained by incessant worship and the loftiest spiritual fellowship.

V. **Demonstrates the Divine faithfulness** (ver. 28). Israel had sinned and

had defamed the reputation of Jehovah, and in their sufferings, which rendered them a spectacle of wonder and a theme of derision, their enemies entertained false and distorted views of the God of Israel. But in the moral reform of Israel and the unmistakable evidence of God's presence and working amongst them, the heathen are compelled to own that He is the only true God, and unalterably faithful in word and deed. The growing unity of the kingdom of righteousness is an ever-present object-lesson to the universe, teaching the indefectible faithfulness of Jehovah.

LESSONS.—1. *The unity of the kingdom of God is founded in spiritual affinity to the Divine.* 2. *Is in process of organisation wherever Christ is embraced and worshipped.* 3. *Will one day be a grand reality.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 15–28. "The whole people of Israel had been represented as participating in the regenerating efficacy of the spirit of life which was to be given from above; and as the direct result of this was to unite them to God, so its secondary operation could not fail to be to unite them in brotherly concord with each other. For the true covenant-people must form but one body, as they can only have one Head; and hence, as the necessary shell for preserving this great truth, it was so strictly enjoined of old that they should have but one Temple, one high-priest, one king, and one commonwealth. The breaking-up of this united brotherhood by the revolt of the ten tribes under Jeroboam, however needful at the time as a salutary chastisement to the house of David, is constantly represented as a sad dismemberment of the household of God, and the source, to a large extent, of the more overwhelming tide of evils which thenceforth set in upon the land, and at last laid it desolate. As soon, therefore, as there might be produced a revived and healthful condition among the covenant-people, there must be a return to brotherly union, and that in connection with the house of David; for to this house had been committed the right to rule over the heritage of God, and to abide in separation from it was to continue in rebellion against Heaven. That there has been no adequate fulfilment of this prophecy in what may be called the literal sense of its terms is too plain to require any lengthened proof. The most characteristic part of the description—the cementing, strengthening, benignant rule of David—had not even the appearance of a literal fulfilment in the post-Babylonish history of Israel; and, with so strong and prominent a feature of an ideal sort as the eternal presidency of David, it seems amazing that any one should expect it to be realised after that manner in the ages to come."—*Fairbairn.*

Vers. 15–17. Joining the Sticks. "1. *Learn the sad condition of the people of Israel at the time the prophet wrote.* (1.) It was contrary to nature. (2.) Displeasing to God. (3.) Disastrous to themselves. 2. *The happy condition to which the people of Israel were about to be restored.* That of unity, harmony, oneness. (1.) Union is of great importance to the Church itself. (2.) It is an immense advantage to the surrounding community. (3.) It is well-pleasing and highly honouring to God. 3. *The agency by which this delightful change was to be effected.* (1.) God breathed into them a principle of spiritual life. (2.) He sent them wise advisers and earnest intercessors. (3.) He visited them with a sore trial—captivity. (4.) He appointed them a common work—the rebuilding of the city and Temple of Jerusalem. (5.) He makes His residence in their midst. Christ in the midst of a Church acts like a magnet in the midst of steel

particles: He attracts all to Himself."—*Pulpit Analyst.*

Ver. 16. "A cleft stick is a poor business in itself, but if God please to make use of so slender a thing, it may serve for a very great purpose; as here by the uniting of two sorry sticks in the hands of the prophet is prefigured the uniting of Judah and Israel, yea, of Jews and Gentiles, in the hand of the Lord—that is, in Christ Jesus, who is the hand, the right hand and the arm of God the Father."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 17. "'Join them one to another.' Some would have this done miraculously; but I do not think God bade the prophet work a miracle. Were it so, God would rather have said, 'I will make them one,' for He can do miracles. It was enough if glued together, or but held in his hand, so that in his hand they were one."—*Pool.*

Vers. 18–20. **The Unity of the People of God**—1. *Has its basis in their united love of God.* 2. *Strengthened by Divinely ordered events.* "I will make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand" (ver. 19). 3. *Admits of great diversity of individual character.* Each tribe had its distinctive peculiarity. 4. *Shall be openly recognised.* "The sticks shall be in thine hand before their eyes" (ver. 20).

Ver. 19. "I will once more bring them all under one King and make them of one mind. Religion is the only best bond of affection. The very heathens honoured the primitive Christians for their unanimity. As the curtains of the Tabernacle were joined by loops, so were they by love; and as the stones of the Temple were so closely cemented together that they seemed to be but one stone, so was it among them. Neither need we wonder, since Christ's Church is but one; neither is there any such oneness or entireness anywhere as among the saints. Other societies are but as the clay in the toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image: they may cleave together, but not incorporate one into another."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 20. "As the separation of Judah and Ephraim was the punishment of apostasy, and led to still further evils, religious and political, so hereafter, when both are one with God, through the spirit of life uniting them to the one Covenant-Head, Messiah-David, they shall be united to one another as no longer two but one people. In respect to the spiritual Israel, the Church, nothing has more impeded the progress of the Gospel than the mutual divisions of professing Christians. Let us pray for the blessed time when all Christians shall be one inwardly and outwardly, as the Lord Jesus prayed (John xvii. 21). Meanwhile, if in non-essentials we differ for a time, let us endeavour at least to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 21–25. **National Unity**—1. *Conditioned by geographical environment* "I will gather them on every side, and make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel" (vers. 21, 22). 2. *Confirmed by the suppression of tribal feuds and animosities.* "They shall be no more two nations" (ver. 22). 3. *Cemented by good government.* "One king shall be king to them all. David, my servant, shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd" (vers. 22, 24). 4. *Has a solid foundation in practical piety.* "Neither shall they defile themselves any more with idols: they shall walk in My judgments, and do them" (vers. 23, 24). 5. *Secures permanency of national life.* "They shall dwell in the land, they and their children's children for ever" (ver. 25).

Ver. 22. "Politically speaking, they never had a king from that day to this, and the grand junction and government spoken of here must refer to another time—to that in which they shall be brought into the Christian Church with the fulness of the Gentiles, when Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, shall rule over them."—*A. Clarke.*

Ver. 23. "Idolatry is a very defiling sin, and the Jews in both kingdoms were exceedingly addicted to it, pertinacious in it, to the utter ruin of both kingdoms; but after the return from Babylonish captivity, we find nowhere that they fell into idolatry."—*Pool.*

Ver. 24. "No Christian is a bad man, unless he be a counterfeit."—*Athenagoras.*

Vers. 26–28. **The Presence of God with His People**—1. *Guaranteed by covenant relationship.* "I will make a covenant of peace with them: I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (vers. 26, 27). 2. *An assurance of stability and increase.* "I will place them and multiply them" (ver. 26). 3. *A motive for loftiest worship.* "I will set My sanctuary in the midst of them: My tabernacle shall be with them" (vers. 26, 27). 4. *A testimony to the Divine faithfulness.* "The heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel" (ver. 28).

Ver. 26. "'It shall be an everlasting covenant with them,' may be fitly explained of the Gospel, being such a covenant as shall never be abolished or give way to any new dispensation. It is certain that the expression, 'a covenant of peace,' could not at all agree with the ancient covenant; for when was there an age, half an age, or twenty years' peace in Israel? The whole history of the Jewish nation is nothing more than a recital of wars and continual divisions. And if we understand it of peace between God and His people, where shall we find this people faithfully attached to the Lord during one century only? We have only to open the books of the prophets and the other sacred records to remark their infidelities and perpetual rebellions against God. This expression, therefore, can only respect the new covenant whereof Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, is the Mediator, and who gives us that true peace which surpasses all conceptions."—*Benson.*

— "In closing this section, we present a brief outline of the view that has been taken of the prophecies contained in the three closely related chapters, xxxiv., xxxv., xxxvii., and which in substance applies equally to many other portions of the prophetical Scriptures. 1. They were originally given to revive and animate the hearts of God's covenant-people, by holding out to them the assured prospect of a reversion from the present evil, and their still certain destination in God's purpose to the highest and most honourable place on the earth. 2. It was the duty of those to whom such prophecies were delivered at once to believe the word spoken to them, and apply themselves in earnest to do what was needed to secure its accomplishment. 3. But there being manifestly ideal features introduced into the delineation, clearly betokens a kind and degree of blessing which could not have been completely fulfilled under the old covenant. 4. The new things thus to be looked for in the future could only meet with their full and adequate accomplishment in Christ, who is certainly the David of the promise. 5. Therefore, in forming one's conceptions now of the real import of such prophecies, we must throw ourselves back upon the narrower and more imperfect relations amid which they were written, and thence judge of what is still to come. Those who would find a literal Israel and a non-literal David, or a literal restoration in Christian times, and a non-literal Tabernacle and ritual of worship, arbitrarily confound together things dissimilar and incongruous, and render certainty of interpretation absolutely impossible. 6. The view thus given is confirmed by the reproduction of some of these prophecies in the field of the New Testament Church, set free, as was expected, from the outward distinctions and limits of the Old. 7. The common interpretation which understands Christ by David, and takes all the rest literally, must inevitably tend to justify the Jew in his unbelief."—*Fairbairn.*

THE WARLIKE ASSAULT OF GOG, AND ITS REPULSE. (Chap. xxxviii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 2. "**Gog.**" "An ideal name; it is simply the root of Magog, the only related name known to history. The whole prophecy demands a *non-literal* interpretation. The prophetical delineations of the Divine principles of government are thrown into the familiar forms of Old Testament relations. The final triumph of Messiah's truth over the most distant and barbarous nations is represented as a literal conflict on a gigantic scale, Israel being the battle-field, ending in the complete triumph of Israel's anointed King, the Saviour of the world. It is a prophetical parable, in which every trait in the delineation is full of important meaning, only couched in the language of a symbolical representation. While the vision respecting Gog and Magog in the Apocalypse (chap. xx.) may be regarded in substance a reannouncement of the prophecy before us, it does not follow that the prophecy in the Apocalypse has exactly the same compass as in Ezekiel. In each case alike the vision is appropriated to describe the final workings of the world's evil, and its results in connection with the kingdom of God; only, the starting-point is placed farther in advance in the one case than in the other. Therefore, as found in Ezekiel, it can throw no light on the chronological arrangement of the Apocalypse."—*Fairbairn.* "**Chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.**" "Rosh," translated *chief*, is taken as a proper name by some, and probably refers to the Russi, a people from whom the modern Russians derive their name. *Schrader* accepts Magog as equivalent to Scythians. Tubal = Tabal, according to him, bordered on Cilicia, and seems to have been what was afterwards Cappadocia. It was famous for great horses. Meshech he regards as having lain north-east of Cappadocia in Lower Armenia. Magog was Gog's original kingdom, though he acquired the mastery over Meshech and Tubal, and so might be called their *chief prince.*

Ver. 3. "**I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.**" His high-sounding titles are repeated, to imply the haughty self-confidence of the invader as invincible.

Ver. 4. "**I will turn thee back**"—"as a refractory wild beast which thinks to take its own way, but is bent by a superior power to turn on a course which must end in its destruction. Satan shall be by overruling Providence permitted to deceive them to their ruin (Rev. xx. 7, 8)."—*Fausset.* "It is significant that the irruption of Gog is here and in what follows referred to Jehovah. He means to march against Jehovah, but the latter has him in tow—he must march whither He will to his own destruction, as in former times Pharaoh did not thwart the God of Israel when he refused to let His people go, but acted so because Jehovah Himself had hardened his heart to plunge him into destruction."—*Hengstenberg.* "**And put hooks into thy jaws**"—rings in thy jaws; the rings which are put in the most tender parts of intractable animals on which to fasten the bridle or reins (chaps. xix. 4, xxix. 4; 2 Kings xix. 28). "**Horses and horsemen**"—a decidedly Scythian trait, for the richness in horses of these hordes, most equestrian tribes, was already known to Herodotus. "**Clothed with all sorts of armour**"—"clothed with splendour, an Assyrian element introduced: thus the figure of Gog is enlarged."—*Lange.*

Ver. 5. "**Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya,**" or *Phut.* "These are in the farthest south from Babylon, where Ezekiel lived. The Asiatic Cush or Ethiopia lay in Central and Northern Babylon. Phut was the name, according to *Ebers*, of some wandering tribes of Arabia. *Sayce* thinks Phut was the Somali country in Eastern Africa."—*Geikie.*

Ver. 6. "Gomer"—the Celtic Cimmerians of Crim-Tartary. "Togarmah"—"the Armenians of the Caucasus, south of Iberia. A pictorial and manifestly symbolical grouping of nations. There is no impossibility in the connection of nations so distant from one another. The anti-Chaldaic coalition, which the prophet himself had witnessed, actually extended from Ethiopia to Persia. The impossible lies rather in this, that all these nations are to co-operate at a definite time against the petty Palestine."—*Hengstenberg*, &c.

Ver. 7. "Be thou prepared." "Irony. Prepare thee and all thine with all needful accoutrements for war, that ye may perish together!"—*Fausset.*

Ver. 8. "After many days thou shalt be visited" (Isa. xxiv. 22, xxix. 6). Gog meant to visit the people of God, but in reality he is himself visited. It was God who led him in order to prepare him for his downfall. It is very consolatory to the Church that God not merely conquers its enemies, that even their hostile undertaking is under His guidance, that they move not hand nor foot but at His command. "In the latter years"—"at the end of the years. This indicates that the catastrophe belongs to a quite new order of things—the Messianic epoch."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 9. "Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm—like a cloud to cover the land." "The cavalry of the Tanjou frequently consisted of two or three hundred thousand men, formidable by the matchless dexterity with which they managed their bows and their horses, by their hardy patience in supporting the inclemency of the weather; unchecked by torrents or by precipices, by the deepest rivers or by the most lofty mountains, they spread themselves over the face of the country and overthrew all who opposed them."—*Gibbon.*

Ver. 10. "Thou shalt think an evil thought"—conceive a mischievous purpose, as to attacking God's people in their defenceless state.

Ver. 11. "I will go up to the land of unwalled villages, to them that dwell safely." The towns lie open, in fancied security, the prize of a sudden attack.

Ver 12. "That dwell in the midst of the land"—"the navel of the land, not physically but morally; a central position for being a blessing to the world. The literal sense, 'navel,' seems to point to the fact of its being the moral centre of the world, not to its moral eminence (chap. v. 5)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 13. "Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish"—"the Arabian nations Sheba and Dedan as representatives of the land-trade, and Tarshish of the sea-trade. Representatives of that portion of the world who, though they are not disposed to take any active part against the cause of God, are well pleased to see others do it. This worldly feeling makes them disrelish the truth, and they are ready to cheer on those who would make a spoil of its defenders."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 15. "All of them riding upon horses." It is related of the Scythians that they eat, drink, and sleep in the saddle.

Ver. 16. "When I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog"—when God displays His incomparable glory in his punishment.

Ver. 17. "Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by My servants the prophets of Israel?" "Gog and Magog are here identified with the enemies spoken of in other prophecies (Num. xxiv. 17–24; Isa. xxvii. 1; Isa. xxvi. 20, 21; Jer. xxx. 23, 24; Joel iii. 2; Micah v. 5, 6; Isa. xiv. 12–14, lix. 19). God is represented as addressing Gog at the time of his assault: therefore the old time is the time long prior when Ezekiel uttered

these prophecies; so he also, as well as Daniel (xi.) and Zechariah (xiv.), are included among the prophets of Israel here."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 18. "**My fury shall come up in My face**"—literally, into My nose; in Hebrew the idiomatic expression for anger, as men in anger breathe strongly through the nostrils.

Ver. 20. "**All shall shake at My presence.**" "An earthquake, the figure of a great annihilating catastrophe in the human world, in which all has the feeling as if the earth were dissolving. The catastrophe affects only the enemies of God's people; but it is so dreadful that the whole world seems to come to an end—that all that lives on earth is felt to be affected by it; every high thing is cast to the ground without discriminating whether it belongs to the enemy or not. All terrible particular judgments in their operations come upon the sense like a universal judgment."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 21. "**Every man's sword shall be against his brother.**" One great means by which God sweeps away the enemies of the king is the internal discord, for which He presents the natural occasions. The community of hatred can scarcely offer successful resistance to these (see historical example, 2 Chron. xx.).

Ver. 22. "**With pestilence, blood, hail, fire, and brimstone.**" The colours of the picture are partly taken from the Egyptian plagues, and from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Ver. 23. "**Thus will I magnify Myself.**" The destruction is effected by an intervention of Jehovah, His fighting for His people, who are small compared to the greatness of Gog (ver. 15).

HOMILETICS.

The Fierce Onslaught of the Enemies of the Truth.

(Vers. 1–23.)

The beautiful picture of tranquil prosperity depicted in the close of the last chapter would be difficult for the captive Jews to realise, unless there was the assurance of protection from hostile attacks like those which had brought them to their present deplorable condition. What avails it, they cry, even if we are restored? The heathen power still predominates, and we shall be crushed back again into irretrievable ruin. The wild, savage races of Scythia had spread terror over all Western Asia in the days of Josiah, and were still remembered with dread. Against such desponding thoughts the prophet here offers comfort. The heathen nations as a whole, in their opposition to the kingdom of God, are represented under the figure of a great invasion of the Holy Land by the Scythian forces. All the battles which restored Israel has to wage are united in one great battle. He who would lead his people out of captivity would be their omnipotent defender, the foe would be triumphantly vanquished, and Israel, the kingdom of the Messiah, finally delivered from all fear, would enter on a period of temporal and spiritual prosperity. The descriptions of the chapter illustrate *the fierce onslaught of the enemies of the Truth.* Observe—

1. **That the enemies of the Truth are rallied and commanded by a leader of conspicuous ability** (vers. 2–7). Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal—an ideal character, one possessing great military genius, faculty for organisation, power to manœuvre vast armies, revelling in destruction, and animated by a mighty hatred to the good. Gog's forces are composed of diverse nationalities,

extending over a wide area (vers. 5, 6), and present an imposing and threatening aspect (vers. 4, 7). The invasion and overthrow of the Chaldeans, the conflict of the Maccabees with Antiochus Epiphanes, the temporary successes and defeat of the Turks—to each of which historical events some interpreters would limit the application of the prophecy—were but feeble prototypes of a coming struggle with a powerful embodied Antichrist. Sin is fruitful in breeding formidable confederacies, and never lacks a leader. The people of God have often to complain with the Psalmist—"How are they increased that trouble me? Many are they that rise up against me" (Ps. iii. 1).

II. **That the enemies of the Truth are fertile in plots to work mischief** (vers. 10–12). "Thou shalt think an evil thought" (ver. 10). Here is a land defenceless, "dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates," its people inoffensive, quietly pursuing their avocations in fancied security; their "cattle and goods" are increasing, and they have no means of offering resistance. Let us pick a quarrel with them, and "take a spoil" (ver. 12). It is true they have done us no harm, nor are likely to do; but what of that? It is enough that they love the truth that we hate, and will become an easy prey to our superior force. If we yield to the suggestions of an evil heart, we trample down the laws of justice and equity, and can readily concert a plan of wholesale robbery and crime. The boldest highwayman or cattle-riever will not go more directly to his mark than we.

III. **That there is a class of persons ever ready to make gain out of the havoc created by the enemies of the Truth** (ver. 13). The eager merchants of Tarshish are referred to as young lions because of their well-known ferocity. There is little room for gentleness and pity in the breast of the unscrupulous trader. Where the carrion lies, there the vultures gather: where there is spoil, the traders. Gain is often made out of the misfortunes and sufferings of others. Many who would shrink from bringing about the ruin of others do not hesitate to make all possible profit out of the ruin. Looters, "the snappers-up of unconsidered trifles," hang about the skirts of every victorious army.

IV. **That the onslaught of the enemies of the Truth is fierce and terrible** (vers. 8, 9, 14–17). The army of Gog was to burst upon Israel like a storm-cloud, enveloping and desolating the land. In all ages the forces of unbelief have made violent attacks upon the citadel of Divine Truth; and there have been times when it seemed as if the foundations had been shaken and the fabric must fall into hopeless ruin. But when the shock has spent itself, the stronghold has stood forth more prominent and stable than before. The great world-crisis is yet future. A time is coming that will test the faith of the most stalwart. Baffled and defeated in all previous attempts, the enemies of the Truth will gather up and concentrate all their powers, and all that wily diplomacy, vindictive hatred, and intensified rage can do will be combined in one grand, united, final effort. What will be the result? Mark—

V. **That the most formidable onset of the enemies of the Truth will be Divinely opposed** (vers. 17–23). 1. *The Divine anger will be roused* (vers. 17–19). "My fury shall come up in My face"—in My nostrils, as men are accustomed to show anger by a flushed countenance and dilated nostrils. An anthropomorphic representation: God stooping to the use of human methods of thought and expression. Injustice and cruelty provoke the Divine wrath; He is not an indifferent spectator of the oppressions inflicted upon His people. "When the great day of His wrath is come, who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. vi. 17). 2. *The Divine power will employ against the enemies of the Truth the most destructive forces*—earthquakes, wars, pestilence, storms (vers. 19–22). The resources of

the universe are in the hands of God, and He can use them on the side of righteousness and in the punishment of tyranny and wrong. Heaven and earth are armed against every evil work, and will effectually prevent its triumph. 3. *The Divine character will be vindicated in taking vengeance on the enemies of the Truth* (ver. 23). God will be known and His honour magnified in judgment us well as in showing mercy. The mightiest army is impotent before His avenging sword. The defence and rescue of His people will demonstrate His power, His faithfulness, and His justice.

LESSONS.—1. *Hatred of the Truth manifests itself in violent opposition.* 2. *A time comes in the life of every man when he must take sides for or against the Truth.* 3. *Evil is doomed to suffer terrible defeat.* 4. *The resources of Omnipotence are at work in defence of the Truth.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Chaps. xxviii., xxix. "The last conflict of the world with God, and the complete overthrow of the former. The place occupied by this section shows that it refers to times subsequent to the restoration of Israel. Hitherto the prophecies have been directed against the more immediate neighbours of God's people. Their fall is to make room for Israel's triumph. But as the Church—the true Israel—waxes stronger and stronger, more distant nations will come into collision and must be overthrown before the triumph is complete. Hence the present prophecy is directed against peoples dwelling in the remote regions of the North. From this quarter had come the terrible invasion of the Scythians, who had possession of Asia twenty-three years, and in the course of this time they had certainly overrun Syria, and had probably made their appearance in the Holy Land. Some have thought that this prophecy is directed against these Scythians, foretelling their fall, like that of the other invaders of the land of Israel. But in this prophecy there is little distinctive of one nation. It is a gathering together of the enemies of Jehovah to make their last effort, and to be overthrown. The seer passes now to the final struggle between good and evil, and the triumphant establishment of the Divine rule. It is the same struggle which is depicted in the Book of Revelation (xx. 7–10), where St. John adopts words and phrases of Ezekiel, indicating thereby that he is predicting the same event which Ezekiel had foretold."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Vers. 1–23. "In many passages of Scripture God forewarns the Church of a great conspiracy, headed by one person, about to be made against God and His Christ, as also against both the literal and the spiritual Israel in the last days. As Antiochus fearfully desolated Judea and blasphemously desecrated the Temple of God, towards the close of Old Testament times, so Antichrist, here described under the ideal name Gog, and his godless hosts under the name Magog, shall terribly oppress Israel and the Church of Christ, and arrogate to himself divine honours, towards the close of the times of the Gentiles in the New Testament dispensation. Haughty and blasphemous self-confidence shall be his prominent characteristic. His immense hordes of formidable warriors in his train, seduced by Satan to their destruction, shall add to his innate presumption."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 1–13. **The Audacity of Evil.**—1. Often embodied in a champion of distinguished genius (vers. 2, 3). 2. Succeeds in organising a formidable confederacy (vers. 4–6). 3. Is blind to the superiority of the power with which it has to wrestle, and is deaf

to all warnings (vers. 7, 8). 4. Apparently overwhelming in its attack (ver. 9). 5. Stimulated by its own wicked devices (ver. 10). 6. Wantonly assaults the inoffensive and defenceless (vers. 11, 12). 7. Is applauded by those who hope to share in the wreckage it creates (ver. 13).

Vers. 1–7. **The Sufferings of God's People.** "1. After prophecies of grace and mercy come tidings of afflictions and judgments (ver. 2). 2. The great princes of the earth, being no friends to the Church of God, have God for their enemy (ver. 3). 3. The Lord at His pleasure can bring enemies and armies upon His own people (ver. 4). 4. The Lord can easily bring men to do His work and service, whatever the difficulty or danger be (ver. 4). 5. From all quarters of the world there are enemies ready to combine and act with Gog and Antichrist against the Church, the Truth, and Christ Himself (vers. 5, 6). 6. The enemies of the Church make great preparations against the same (ver. 7). 7. Princes, notwithstanding all their preparations, cannot secure themselves, nor those under their command (ver. 7)."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 2. "This cannot be one single person, or one only prince, though like enough it points out some one by whom the troubles foretold were begun; yet the successors of this one, whoever he was, are included and designed by this Gog; nor is he to be limited to one certain nation that he was king of, nor yet confined to one age, or to two or three. Others think that all the enemies of Israel, in all quarters, both open and secret enemies, are here intended, and that the anti-Christian forces and combinations are what the prophet foretells."—*Pool.*

Ver. 4. "I will turn thee back, and put My hook into thy jaws"—"I will disappoint all thy designs, and turn thee about as easily as a fisherman masters a great fish, when he has once fastened the hook into its jaws."—*Benson.*

— "I will place rings in thy jaws." "Gog is represented as an unmanageable beast which is compelled to follow its leader, and the thought is thereby expressed that Gog is compelled to obey the power of God against his will."—*Keil.*

Ver. 7. "God, the prophet, and the Church deride this mighty preparation, as once the daughter of Zion laughed Sennacherib, that proud Assyrian, to scorn, and the scoff is doubled. Such a mighty army will need great magazines and granaries, and good watches and guards, for their marching in safety; therefore, awaken thy diligence, let nothing be wanting, for, O Gog, thou wilt find I am against thee, saith the Lord."—*Pool.*

Ver. 8. **God Slow to Punish.** "1. God bears with the worst of men a long time. 'After many days.' 2. Though wicked men be spared long, yet at last they shall suffer. 'Thou shalt be visited.'"—*Greenhill.*

— "They shall dwell safely." "This began to be fulfilled when, for three hundred and eighty years after their return, Israel lived tolerably quiet: afterwards Antiochus vexed them and did much damage. What remains of longer and fuller quiet and prosperity after the slaying of Gog, time will discover to the people of God, whose lot it will be to stand up in those days."—*Pool.*

Ver. 9. "This storm is violent, with confused, tumultuous noises and with devastation, as the word implies; and come as a storm—that is, as dark, as large, as inevitable, and which continueth the violent waving storm."—*Pool.*

— **The Adversities of the Church.** "1. The Church and people of God are subject to calamities. The Church is oft afflicted and tossed with tempest: but here is some comfort — storms, tempests, and clouds last not long; they cease after a little time, and the sun shines again. 2. The goodness of God in foretelling the Church what shall come upon it: storm, clouds, perplexity

—not to discourage His people, but to awaken them to prayer, holiness of life, and living by faith."—*Greenhill.*

— "In the world we have anguish to the end; before we expect it, a storm arises and heaven and earth seem hid from our eyes. Our security is peace with God: Christians wish indeed peace with all men, but the world keeps no peace with them. Such is its turbulence, that it has no rest; such its darkness, that it would like to shut out all light, even God Himself from being our lamp. — If great armies resemble clouds, how soon can a wind disperse them! (2 Kings xix. 35)."—*Lange.*

Vers. 10–13. **God's Knowledge of the Tactics of the Wicked.** "1. God foreknows and determines things to come, even those things that seem most free and contingent, as the thoughts of men's hearts (ver. 10). 2. God doth not only foreknow but prediscovers the purposes, counsels, and plots of His Church's enemies, to evidence His care thereof (ver. 10, 11). 3. The enemies of the Church do watch and take advantage against the Church: they wait for and seek occasions to ruin the same (vers. 11, 12). 4. Wicked ones will undertake great matters and venture their lives to satisfy their lusts (ver. 12). 5. The wicked confederate and combine together to mischief the Church of God (ver. 13). Wicked men are thorns, and they cleave together to scratch and vex the righteous."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 10. **A Wicked Brain.** 1. A willing ally of a wicked heart. 2. Fertile in plotting mischief. 3. Its only conception of justice is how it may most cleverly circumvent it. 4. Is indifferent to the sufferings its schemings may occasion others. 5. Is often deluded by its own smartness.

— "Thus God is a heart-searcher; He knows the evil purpose in the man himself."—*Starck.*

Vers. 12, 13. "A covetous desire for the possessions of the people of God and envy at their exalted position in the centre of the world are the motives by which Gog is impelled to enter upon his predatory expedition against the people living in the depth of peace. This covetousness is so great, that even the rich trading populations of Sabea, Dedan, and Tarshish perceive it, and declare that it is this alone which has determined Gog to undertake his expedition. Their words give prominence to the obvious thirst for booty which characterises the multitude led by Gog."—*Keil.*

Ver. 12. "How good it is to possess the goods which cannot be stolen—the joy which no one shall take from us! —To the end the world seeks only the temporal, the earthly."—*Lange.*

Ver. 13. "The merchants of Tarshish —the inhabitants of the sea-coast westward, and Magog north. Robbers by land on three sides, pirates by sea on the fourth, in a confederacy to spoil the Church of God."—*Pool.*

— "It is the tendency of a gain-seeking spirit to look to no other considerations but its own selfish and worldly interests. Gain is the godliness of the carnal mind. Whatever promotes directly or indirectly the acquisition of silver, gold, cattle, and goods is the uppermost thought; and whilst, perhaps, the more quietly disposed of the worldly shrink from an active participation in unjust and ungodly invasions, yet they are well pleased at such wars when seeming to be conducive to their own gains, and will not scruple to traffic in the unhallowed spoils, at the sacrifice of conscience and the will of God."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 14–23. **The Power of Evil**—1. Is imposing in its battle-march (vers. 14–16). 2. Is allured and limited by the power it opposes (vers. 16, 17). 3. Excites the Divine wrath (vers. 18, 19). 4. The forces of heaven and earth combine in its defeat (vers. 20–22). 5. Its defeat a signal vindication of the Divine character (ver. 23).

Vers. 14–16. The Divine Protection. "1. When God's people are in Canaan they have safety (ver. 14). 2. Those who design and attempt mischief against the people of God shall experimentally know that God is their Protector and the Revenger of their wrongs (ver. 14). 3. The secret plots and deep designs of men at length break out into action (ver. 15). 4. The great enemies of the Church have many helpers and adherents fitted to further their wicked designs (ver. 15). 5. Though all people and lands in the world be the Lord's, yet some people and lands are His in a more peculiar manner (ver. 16). 6. God takes occasion, from the attempts of the wicked, to execute His just judgments upon them, and so to get glory to His name even from heathens (ver. 16)."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 14. "'Prophesy and say unto Gog.' Say it over again, that it may be the better considered for the strengthening of the hands and hearts of My people."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 16. "Gog gathers all from all quarters to be with him to take the spoil; God brings them together to do that among them which may make the heathen see and own His hand. They do it in proud contempt of God and His people; but God doth it to glorify His own name and to vindicate His people."—*Pool.*

Ver. 17. "'By My servants the prophets of Israel.' Not by prognosticators or soothsayers, but by true prophets. Now, though they had not foretold this when Ezekiel did, yet when the question shall be asked by the Church, it will be so many hundreds of years past, it may well refer to these prophets. Besides, Dan. xi.; Zech. xiv.; Isa. xxvi. 20, 21, xxvii. 1; Jer. xxx. 23, 24; Joel iii. 1, 15, 16; Micah v. 5, 6, are prophets cited as those who spake of this mighty enemy and his coming, and from which an understanding reader may soon collect that this foe was intended as well as others in those places."—*Pool.*

— **The Credibility of Prophecy.** "1. The Lord doth infallibly know things to come. 2. The prophets delivered many things which were not recorded. 3. Those whom God sends to make known His mind to men, He owns, honours, and protects. 4. It is not an accidental or casual thing that enemies do come against the Church."—*Greenhill.*

— Everything has been told before: they who hold to the Word have to fear no surprises.

Vers. 18–22. God's Proceedings against His Enemies. "1. When wicked men are plotting and attempting the ruin of the Church, God's wrath is kindled against them (ver. 18). 2. When mischief is intended against God's people, His love and indignation are manifested: His love to His people, His indignation towards their enemies (vers. 18, 19). 3. The judgments of God are dreadful; they affect all creatures—the fishes of the sea, the fowls of heaven, the beasts of the field, all that creeps upon the earth: all men on the face of the earth shall shake; mountains, rocks, walls, shall fall (ver. 20). 4. God can easily raise forces against His and the Church's enemies; He can do it without any trouble (vers. 21, 22). 5. As God can easily gather armies for the good of His Church, so He can as easily ruin armies which are against His Church: He can mingle a perverse spirit among them, so divide them that they shall execute one another (ver. 21). 6. God hath a variety of means and ways whereby to destroy armies and punish enemies (ver. 22). 7. Those who join with great ones in wicked enterprises must look to suffer grievous things with them."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 18. "Fury is the glow which bursts forth in the breathing of wrath. The wrath of God is the holy jealousy with which He, for the protection of His kingdom—the kingdom of peace—dashes down the wicked; and this wrath of eternal protecting love is fearful."—*Schmieder.*

Vers. 19–23. "The visible creation takes part in this great catastrophe. A dreadful scene of confusion ensues, and ruin bursts forth from every side upon the head of sinners. In fierce bewilderment they draw their swords one upon another. All conceivable plagues work together for their destruction, and so Jehovah is manifested as the holy God."—*Hävernick.*

Ver. 20. "Here is a lofty strain indeed, giving us the description of the tokens of God's presence against His enemies; the effects of His displeasure against them are seen in all the creatures, sensible that their Maker is angry, though they know not with whom or for what. If to be interpreted literally, we shall find some Scripture parallels (Ps. lxxvii. 16, 19; xxix. 5, 6). But men, apprehensive of God's displeasure and shaken with their own guilt, shall much more shake. But I think it is a very elegant allusive description of those strange troubles and consternation of men's minds at that day, and so metaphorically to be understood."—*Pool.*

Ver. 23. "Thus undeniably prove that I am the mighty, just, faithful, wise, holy, and merciful God toward My people; and that I am the great, just, and terrible One against Mine and My Church's enemies."—*Pool.*

— "This end God proposeth to Himself in all His works; and well He may, since He hath none higher than Himself to whom to have respect. And let all this that hath been said comfort us against the rage and good success, if any such yet be, of the anti-Christian rout, since these are but—as was once said of decaying Carthage—the last sprunts and bites of dying wild beasts."—*Trapp.*

— "The conclusion is, that the result of everything is to magnify and sanctify God. We ought, therefore, to begin all our affairs with God."—*Lange.*

THE DESTRUCTION OF GOG AND HIS VAST ARMIES. (Chap. xxxix.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 2. "I will leave but the sixth part of thee"—I will six thee; *i.e.*, afflict thee with six plagues—pestilence, blood, overflowing rain, hailstones, fire, brimstone (chap. xxxviii. 22). Or, draw thee back with a hook of six teeth (chap. xxxviii. 4)—the six teeth being those six plagues. The rendering in the text supposes that the verb is derived from the Hebrew numeral six; but this rendering is not recognised by the LXX. or the Vulgate. The verb has an Ethiopic root, and the passage should be rendered—I will *lead thee along*—to thy ruin.

Ver. 3. "I will smite thy bow out of thy left hand." The Scythians were renowned as archers. The left hand holds the bow, the right bends it and fits on the arrow. God will strike the weapons out of his hand, so that he shall be incapable of fighting. "Thou shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel." The scene of Israel's preservation shall be that of Gog's destruction.

Ver. 6. "I will send a fire among them that dwell in the isles." The judgment described in chap. xxxviii. 20 as universal is here extended to the isles to show that it should fall not only on Gog and his land, but on those who share his feelings of hatred and opposition to the kingdom of God, and who had perhaps helped Gog with fleets and troops.

Ver. 7. "I will not let them pollute My holy name"—by seeming to desert My people. He would profane His name if He were to abandon His people continually to the heathen world. The revelation of holiness in Israel precludes further profanation of Jehovah in reference to Israel among the heathen.

Ver. 8. "Behold it is come, it is

done"—very expressive, denoting the absolute certainty of the event. The prophet sets it down as already past, as it is the nature of faith to see that which is not as if it already existed.

Ver. 9. **"They shall burn them with fire seven years."** The weapons of the army left on the battlefield shall be so numerous as to supply fuel for the people of the land for seven years. *Seven years* is a hyperbolical term derived from the intensive significancy of the number in Hebrew usage and designed to express a very long time. Seven was the number connected with the cleansing after contact with the dead (Num. xix. 11), and this purification of the land by the clearance of the heathenish spoils was a holy work, and indicated how thorough would be the judgment of God upon His enemies.

Ver. 11. **"I will give unto Gog a place of graves."** Gog meant to bury the people of God and appropriate their land; but he is buried by them, and receives only so much of the land as suffices for a grave. **"The valley of the passengers on the east"**—referring to its position on the east side of the Dead Sea, along which lay the high-road for traffic to Petra and Ezion-geber. It would thus be notoriously public, and, arresting travellers in their progress, would compel them to reflect on the signal judgment inflicted on the enemies of the covenant-people. There is also, as is common in Hebrew, a play upon words—there were *passengers* to be buried, *passengers* to walk over their graves, *passengers* to bury them (ver. 15). **"It shall stop the noses of the passengers"**—arrest the attention and impede the progress of the passers by the multitude of graves and the strong odour of decay. Their graves would be close to those of their ancient prototypes, Sodom and Gomorrah in the Dead Sea, both alike being signal instances of God's judgments.

Ver. 14. **"Men of continual employment."** Literally, *men of continuance*, men regularly appointed to this business, to express the magnitude of the work and the systematic way in which it is performed. **"After the end of seven months shall they search"**—to see if the work was complete.

Ver. 16. **"Thus shall they cleanse the land."** According to the Mosaic law, a dead body caused a peculiar defilement to all with which it came in contact. So that, as the land of Israel represents figuratively the Church of Christ, the purification of that land is a proper part of the figure to indicate such a sanctification and cleansing of His Church as St. Paul describes in Eph. v. 26, 27.

Ver. 17. **"Speak to every feathered fowl and every beast: gather yourselves to My sacrifice."** This bold imagery is quite in the style of Ezekiel's poetic genius. The invited guests are represented as being filled not only with the flesh of the victims in general, but with that of the horses and the charioteers. The entire passage is strikingly parallel with Rev. xix. 17, 19. Compare also Isa. xviii. 6, xxxiv. 6; Zeph. i. 7; Mark ix. 49.

Ver. 18. **"Fatlings of Bashan"**—often applied in the prophets to proud, despotic, wanton enemies of God and His people, Bashan being renowned for its fat meadows. Fatness implies prosperity, which often makes men refractory towards God (Deut. xxxii. 14, 15).

Vers. 22, 23. **"The house of Israel shall know; and the heathen shall know."** The terrible judgment upon Gog will have this twofold effect as a revelation of the glory of God—Israel will know that the Lord is, and will continue to be, its God; and the heathen will know that He gave Israel into their power and thrust it out of its own land, not from weakness, but to punish it for its faithless apostasy.

Ver. 25. **"And have mercy on the whole house of Israel."** The restora-

tions of Israel heretofore have been partial; there must be one yet future that is to be universal (Hos. i. 11; Rom. xi. 26).

Ver. 26. "**After they have borne their shame**"—after they shall have borne in full the punishment of their sin: after they have become sensible of their guilt and ashamed of it (chaps. xx. 43; xxxvi. 31).

Ver. 28. "**And have left none of them any more there.**" After the fall of the Chaldean monarchy, access to their native land was free to all Israel; and those who voluntarily remained had yet in Canaan their home and in the Temple at Jerusalem their spiritual dwelling-place.

Ver. 29. "**I have poured out My Spirit.**" Comp. Joel ii. 28; Zech. xii. 10; Acts ii. 17. There St. Peter distinctly appropriates these prophecies to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and the inauguration of the Church of Christ by that miraculous event. But this was the beginning of the fulfilment of these verses of the prophets. They shall find their consummation when time shall be no more.

HOMILETICS.

The Signal Defeat of the Enemies of God's People.

(Vers. 1–29.)

In this chapter we have a prophetic description of the ultimate fate of Gog, the ideal impersonation of the power of evil, and the utter destruction of his vast armies. The embattled hosts march to the conflict with proud ostentation and confident of victory. Their swords shall soon provide a banquet for the birds of prey that hover over them, and for the wild beasts whose hungry growls are heard around them, little dreaming that the stricken bodies of the invaders must furnish the feast. An unseen and irresistible power lures them on to their ruin; they are smitten with paralysis, their weapons drop from their hands and cover the ground like corn newly cut with the reaper; they perish in myriads on the mountains and the open fields, the birds and beasts are summoned to gorge themselves on the human carrion, and the only remnants of the once formidable warriors of Gog are found in innumerable graves. In this boldly conceived vision we have a realistic picture of the final and utter destruction of all the enemies of God's people.

I. **This defeat will be an act of Divine judgment** (vers. 1–7). The champions of evil do not sufficiently consider what is involved in the fact that God is against them. Little do they know about the infinite resources of the power they have to reckon with. They see in the people of God only the apparently helpless victims of their hatred and fury: they know not, nor do they care to know, the real character of their Almighty Defender. The silence of God they mistake for indifference; the patience of God they misconstrue into weakness; the threatenings of God are meaningless vauntings, or if they mean anything, they apply to every one else but themselves; their attitude and spirit is a combination of blasphemous and reckless defiance. God is slow to punish, full of long-suffering and mercy, careful to afford ample space for repentance; and yet all the time a finely attuned ear may detect the Divine refrain rising on the air, already palpitating with the breath of coming vengeance—"Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord; and shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" (Jer. v. 9, 29; ix. 9). At last the thunderbolt crashes out of the

gathering clouds, the enemies of God are stricken with fear, their forces routed, and all are involved in terrible and irrevocable destruction.

II. **This defeat will be on a scale of unexampled vastness.** This is evident—1. From the number of weapons strewn on the battlefield (vers. 8–10). 2. From the time and space occupied in burying the slain (vers. 11–16). 3. From the greatness of the feast provided for the birds and beasts of prey (vers. 17–22). Many of the wars of history were waged on a gigantic scale, and the wars of the Jews were often attended with great slaughter. The two rival kingdoms of Judah and Israel were in perpetual feud with each other, and there were few wars in the history of the world marked with greater ferocity and destruction. It is computed that in one battle the number of the slain amounted to no less than 500,000 Israelites. But the greatest battle of the ages will not exceed in calamity and carnage the final overthrow of the enemies of God's people. Their widespread combinations, their vast hosts cleverly marshalled in battle array, their compacted unity, will make their defeat the easier, the more direct and complete. They will be allured to gather into a mass, that in a mass they may perish.

III. **This defeat will make clear to the nations the unchanging equity of the Divine procedure.** 1. *That the people of God, like all other peoples, are punished because of their iniquities* (vers. 23, 24). The Israelites wilfully and stubbornly trespassed against God; therefore He hid His face, withdrew His protection, and abandoned them to the cruelty of their enemies. They could not complain that they were unjustly or harshly treated. "According to their uncleanness and their transgressions" they were dealt with. They deserved all they got, and when they came to themselves, they would be the first to acknowledge it. It was not God's vindictiveness but their own iniquities that plunged them into misery. He simply deals with them as with all other offenders, of whatever nationality. God is the implacable foe of sin wherever and in whomsoever found (Rom. ii. 6–11). He is unchangeably faithful in justice, mercy, and truth. 2. *That all who faithfully respond to the teaching of the Divine Spirit shall enjoy the protection and favour of God* (vers. 25–29). While God will punish evil-doers, He does not overlook the least symptoms of repentance, and is eager to make known His clemency. Those who have injured Him the most are assured of His mercy. It is said the Emperor Adrian, meeting a man who had insulted him before he came to the throne, said to him, "Approach; you have nothing to fear; I am an emperor." It is God-like to be free from resentment. The Spirit is given to convince of sin, to melt the soul into contrition, to direct it to the great source of help, and to bring it face to face with God, where all is light and peace and safety. God hides His face from the incorrigible sinner, but reveals it to the truly penitent.

LESSONS.—1. *The most powerful combinations of the wicked are impotent when in conflict with Jehovah.* 2. *The Divine honour is pledged to ensure the ultimate triumph of righteousness.* 3. *Disobedience to the Divine law in individuals or in nations will be visited with terrible punishment.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–29. "The present chapter proceeds to describe the defeat of evil and the triumph of God and His people. We must bear in mind that Ezekiel is not predicting the invasion of an actual army, but the advance of evil under that figure. So he declares the overthrow of evil by the figure of

a host routed and slain, and the consequent purification of a land partially overrun and disturbed. It is the manner of Ezekiel to dwell upon the details of the figurative acts which he portrays, bringing them before the mind as vivid pictures, and employing, so to speak, the strongest colouring. This has led some so to rest on the picture as to forget that it is a figure. Thus they have searched history to find out some campaign in the land of Israel, some overthrow of invaders, on which to fix this prophecy, and have assigned localities to the burial-place, and even thought to discover the spot to which belongs the appellation, *Hamon-Gog*. But in truth the details are set forth in order to carry out the allegory, and their very extravagance, so to speak, points out that we have but the shadow of a great spiritual reality, which man can only faintly represent and feebly grasp *in a figure."—Speaker's Commentary.*

— "We find in the prophecy the following important and salutary truths: —1. While the appearance of the new David to take the rule and presidency over God's heritage would have the effect of setting His people free from the old troubles and dangers which had hitherto assailed them, it should be far from securing them against all future conflicts with evil. It would rather tend to call up other adversaries and enlarge the field of conflict, so as to make it embrace the most distant and barbarous regions of the earth. For the whole earth is Christ's heritage, and sooner or later it must come to an issue between the adherents of His cause and the children of error and corruption. 2. From the very nature of the case, this trial would fall to be made on a very large scale and with most gigantic resources, so that all preceding contests should appear small and vanish out of sight, in comparison of this last great struggle in which the world's destiny was to be decided for good or evil. 3. Though the odds in this conflict could not but appear beforehand very great against the people and cause of Christ, yet the result should be certainly on their side, and simply because with them is the truth and the might of Jehovah. 4. As all originated in the claim of Messiah and His truth to the entire possession of the world, so the whole is represented as ending in the complete establishment of the claim. It is understood at last that it was His zeal for the interests of righteousness which led Him to chastise, in former times, His own professing people, and that the same now has induced Him to render them triumphant over every form and agency of evil. And now, all counter rule and authority being put down, the prospect stretches out before the Church of eternal peace and blessedness in what at length become the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—*Fairbairn.*

Vers. 1–7. **God's Dealings with His Enemies.** "1. Those who are enemies unto the Church, God is an enemy unto them. 2. Wicked men may be in great honour and have great power. 3. There are seeming contradictions in Holy Scripture. God was with Gog and against Gog: with him by His providence to bring him forth to manifest his spleen and gall against the land of Israel; and against him by His power and justice to destroy him for his cruelty and bloodiness. There are many scriptures seeming to destroy one another; but if rightly understood do sweetly comply and shake hands together. 4. God's hand is in the undertakings of enemies against the Church. 5. It is in the Lord to disable and disappoint warriors when they are ready for battle. 6. That in the same place where God shows rich mercy to the godly, there He executes severe judgments upon the enemies. 7. That armies and others are exposed to public shame and miserable ends is of God. 8. What the Lord speaks, that shall certainly take place. 9. When God begins to visit the enemies of His Church, He makes progress therein. 10. When God shows mercy to His Church and destroys the enemies

of it, He provides for His own honour, sanctifies His name, and makes Himself to be known distinct from all other gods."—*Greenhill.*

— **The Infatuation of the Wicked**—1. Renders them reckless in their attack upon a superior Power (ver. 1). 2. Blinds them to the fact that they are being led to destruction by the Power they defy (ver. 2). 3. Knows not the moment they may be suddenly reduced to helplessness (ver. 3). 4. Involves them in terrible and universal destruction (vers. 4–6). 5. Makes their punishment a means of exalting the justice and holiness of the Being they madly opposed (ver. 7).

Vers. 2–5. "As the land of Israel shall be the scene of Gog's wicked attack on the people of God, so shall it be the scene of the awful punishment inflicted upon Gog and of the deliverance of Israel. How often God thus marks the retributive justice of His dealings (as in the case of Ahab's and Jezebel's obtaining possession of Naboth's vineyard through false accusation, murder, and robbery) by visiting the transgressor with judgment on the very scene of his guilt! (1 Kings xxi. 19, xxii. 38; 2 Kings ix. 21, 25, 26, 36)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 3. The Man of War—1. An imposing figure when fully armed for battle. 2. Should carefully weigh the merits of the cause he espouses. 3. Exposes his folly when he proudly boasts about his individual prowess. 4. May in a moment be deprived of both strength and weapons.

— "I will disarm thee. As Herodotus reports of Sennacherib and his Assyrians in Egypt, that their quivers, bow-strings, and targets were gnawed to pieces by mice and rats in one night, so that they were forced to fly for their lives. And as our chroniclers tell us that in the battle between Edward III. of England and Philip of France there fell such a piercing shower of rain as dissolved their strings and made their bows useless."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 6. "Those who shall abet Gog, virtually though not actively joining him in the invasion, shall be taught by bitter experience to know that their fancied security in their sea-girt or sea-washed and distant lands is a self-deceit; a fire from the Lord shall consume them, so that they shall know, to their cost, the God of power, whom they refused to know as the God of grace and love. Self-confidence and careless living, under the mistaken notion of security, have proved the ruin of millions of immortal souls."—*Fausset.*

— "The fire of God upon sympathies with evil. — The far-reaching effect of Divine judgment."—*Lange.*

Ver. 7. "Israel hereafter shall, by the special grace of God, be kept from dishonouring the holy name of their God by their sins and the consequent judgments which made the heathen think that Jehovah was unable or unwilling to save His people. How joyful is the prospect to the people of God that the time is ere long coming when they shall be placed under the blessed necessity of uninterrupted obedience to God's will! Temptations from the flesh, the world, and Satan, which now harass them, shall then be at an end. Sin, which is now their greatest sorrow because it most dishonours the name of their Lord, shall be no more; and the Lord shall make known His holy name with such attractive power that He will not let them pollute it any more."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 8. **The Infallible Certitude of the Divine Word.** 1. Notwithstanding that all natural appearances are against it. 2. Though its fulfilment is in the future. 3. Notwithstanding the most desperate opposition. 4. Confirmed by many notable examples. 5. Because the Lord hath spoken it. 6. Should induce an unfaltering confidence.

— **Fulfilled Prophecy.** "1. There is a certain time determined for the destruction of the Church's enemies, which God looks upon as present and

done. 2. The particular time is hidden from men and known only unto God."—*Greenhill.*

Vers. 9, 10. **The Spoils of a Great Victory.** "1. God will give victories to His Church and people which seem incredible. 2. The Lord makes that advantageous to His people which their enemies intended to damnify and ruin them by. 3. After the overthrow of Gog and Magog, Antichrist and his adherents, the Church of God shall have great peace. 4. The people of God shall have a day of recompense for the wrongs and injuries they have sustained."—*Greenhill.*

— "It may be wondered they burn these weapons which might be of use to them for defence and safety; but it was done partly because they were weapons of the uncircumcised, partly because they were *anathemata*, as all Jericho was, but chiefly in testimony that God was their safety and defence."—*Pool.*

— Mariana in his History of Spain says, that after the Spaniards had given that signal overthrow to the Saracens in 1212, they found such a vast quantity of lances, javelins, and such-like that they served them for four years for fuel.

— "The fire of Christianity comes at last over all the weapons of this world. They then warn instead of injuring. If God is our shield, then it is seen what becomes of all the shields of men, long and short. Let not yourself be covered and screened by the world. The world, with its pomp and power, after all exists only to furnish fuel for the children of God. Thus the godly man finally gains the upper hand, however long and strongly the ungodly have behaved proudly."—*Lange.*

Vers. 11–16. **The Burial of the Slain.** "1. God disappoints the expectation of the wicked while living, yet sometimes affords favour when they are dead. 2. After great victories wherein many are slain people should, for public good, be careful to bury the dead, though it require time, be troublesome and chargeable. 3. By great victories over enemies God honours His own name and makes His people to have a name. 4. After conquering there ought to be cleansing."—*Greenhill.*

— "Where Gog shall expect to find a spoil and a possession, he shall only find a grave; and that a grave near the sea that entombs his ancient prototypes, the fire-blasted cities of Sodom and Gomorrah—the Dead Sea. The publicity of this place of burial will arrest the attention of the many that pass that way. These shall recognise the righteous judgment of the Lord in the destruction of Gog. How often are the transgressor's deeply-laid plans brought to nothing in a moment, and the mischief which he prepares for others recoils on himself! Those who have experienced great deliverances should be thoroughly zealous in promoting a complete and radical reformation. Every man should render the utmost help he can towards furthering the good work. Sin, the polluting thing, needs to be searched out in its most secret recesses. Let not the casual passer-by think that he is exempt from the duty of exerting himself in word and deed for the glory of God and the good of the Church, any more than the stationary dweller in his own home. All have their place and work to do; and it is only by general co-operation that the work of the Lord can be most completely effected."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 11. **The Fate of the Proud.** 1. A defeat where they expected victory. 2. Execration and disgust where they expected applause. 3. Oblivion where they expected fame. 4. A grave where they expected riches. 5. It is a testimony to the sacredness of the human body that even the proud and cruel are honoured with a grave. 6. Justice leaves its dead victim at the grave's mouth: Mercy tenderly buries it.

— "Besides many other reasons for burying these slaughtered multitudes

the humanity that religion is full of would guide the Jews to it, and God tells us that Gog shall have a grave in Israel. He came to take possession, and so he shall, but not as he purposed and hoped, but as God intended: Gog shall possess his house of darkness in that land which he invaded to make a prey of. He shall have one place there—a grave."—*Pool.*

— "Like Gog, many a one finds a grave where he least expected it. The grave, a quiet answer to so many loud questions, the echo to so many and various forms of 'I will!' Here the proudest and most foaming waves will subside. Masters cease at the brink of the grave; the continuation follows —i.e., rottenness, horror, judgment of survivors on the dead, to say nothing of the judgment of God, who has from the beginning had the same decision regarding them."—*Lange.*

Ver. 13. "It shall be to the house of Israel a renown, a commendation, matter of praise, that they did, like men, bury the dead, who otherwise must have been all dung on the face of the earth, and the swelling hill rising from their buried bones shall be a monument to the praise of Israel's courtesy. Or else thus, the day of My being glorified shall be a renown to Israel. As it is an honour to be owned of God, so when God shows He owneth such, He gives them honour among all that observe it."—*Pool.*

Ver. 15. **The Sacredness of the Human Body.** 1. It is designed to be the temple of the Divine (1 Cor. vii. 19). 2. Shall ultimately be raised from the dead (Rom. viii. 23; 1 Cor. xv. 35). 3. Should ensure it reverent burial. 4. Not a single bone to be treated with indignity.

Ver. 16. "The world, the city of the dead—Hamonah. What a stillness of death after the bustle of so many departing things and departed men!—The enemies of the Church leave after their death a shameful name behind them (Acts xii. 20–23)."—*Lange.*

Vers. 17–29. "The destruction of the enemy, viewed as to its results with reference to the people of God. The purposes of the past dispensation shall be made clear to God's people themselves and to the heathen. All shall see that the judgments which have fallen upon the chosen race were no sign of any change of purpose of the Almighty, but the consequence of their sins, and that, these sins once abandoned, the favour of their God will return in yet more abundance."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Vers. 17–20. **Evidences of Divine Judgment.** "1. That all creatures are at the command of God, and ordered to do this or that according to His wise providence (ver. 17). 2. That God doth execute some great and signal judgment when He summons the creatures to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the slain (vers. 18, 19). 3. It is matter of delight and pleasure unto God to destroy the enemies of His Church and people (ver. 17). 4. God is impartial in His judicial dispensations; He punisheth the great delinquents as well as the lesser (vers. 18, 20). 5. Great men and vulgar ones also may be a prey to the creatures, and lie without burial for a season. 6. God provides for the brute and dumb creatures, and that abundantly (ver. 17)."—*Greenhill.*

— **A Strange Banquet.** 1. If we consider the guests invited—the birds and beasts of prey (ver. 17). 2. If we consider the kind of food provided —the flesh of princes and mighty men (ver. 18). 3. If we consider the horrible surfeiting of the wild revellers (vers. 19, 20). 4. A revolting spectacle of humbled pride.

Ver. 17. "What an end after such a beginning! The beginning was, Israel shall fall a prey to Gog; now the end is, that Gog lies there a prey to the very beasts of the field."—*Lange.*

Vers. 21–24. **The Final Issue of Divine Punishment.** "1. The great

end of God's judgments upon sinful men is His glory (ver. 21). 2. Dreadful judgments upon the wicked are engaging mercies unto the godly (ver. 22). 3. God doth withhold mercies from His people and lay sad judgments upon them for their sins (ver. 23). 4. God will convince His enemies of the true cause of His executing dreadful judgments upon His people (ver. 23). 5. None have just ground of complaint whatsoever judgments are upon them, howsoever God deal by them (ver. 24)."—*Greenhill.*

Vers. 23–29. **The Hidden and the Open Face of God.** 1. That human sin obscures the vision of God's face (vers. 23, 24). 2. That when God hides His face His people are exposed to the ravages of the enemy (ver. 23). 3. That while God hides His face His hand is employed in promoting the interests of His people (vers. 25, 27, 28). 4. That when suffering humbles the soul into genuine repentance the face of God reappears. Repentance is the soul coming to the knowledge of God (vers. 26, 28). 5. The work of the Divine Spirit upon the soul prepares it for the everlasting vision of the open face of God (ver. 29; comp. 2 Cor. iii. 18).

Ver. 23. "The heathen thought meanly of the God of Israel, and reckoned they came into captivity because the people of some greater god had by the power of their god prevailed against Israel's God and His people; but by this overthrow given to Gog they shall see it was not impotence in Israel's God, but iniquity in Israel's people, that brought them into captivity. When God withdrew His defence, as fenceless, they fell under the sword of the enemy, for it is He that subdueth enemies and giveth victory."—*Pool.*

Vers. 25–29. **God's Goodness a Motive for His Activity.** "1. The afflictions of God's people may be long and sharp, yet they shall not be always; they shall have an end. 2. There is a day of mercy to come for the Jews, even all of them (ver. 25). 3. The great things God doth for His people are not done for their worth or merits, but for His holy name's sake (ver. 25). 4. Sin brings men to shame and punishment, which they must undergo somewhere or other (ver. 26). 5. In times of peace and safety usually men forget God and sin against Him (ver. 26). 6. The Lord by openly delivering His people from an afflicted condition doth sanctify His own name and hath it sanctified by others (vers. 27, 28). 7. There is a time when the Jews shall not only have mercy, but abundant and lasting mercy (ver. 29). Now they are like dead trees without any sap in them; but then they will be like trees well-rooted, full of sap, and in their greatest glory—full of branches, leaves, blossoms, fruit, and the sun shining upon them (Rom. xi. 15)."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 25. "This restoring captive Jews is mere mercy. It is very true by sin they deserved to be made captives, and it is as true they never did or could deserve a deliverance from captivity. It was not extremity of justice that so punished, but it was the riches of mercy that so pardoned and redeemed."—*Pool.*

Ver. 27. "Sanctified by their accepting punishment, repenting for sin, loathing their former ways and themselves for them, acknowledging God to be holy, engaging themselves in covenant of perpetual obedience to God and keeping it; by these things God will be sanctified among the Israelites and in sight of the nations, when they see the furnace hath purified them."—*Pool.*

Ver. 29. **The Promise of the Spirit.** 1. The constant theme of Old Testament prophets. 2. Blessedly realised in the history of the Church in all ages. 3. Fulfilled in the remarkable advances of the Gospel in the present day. 4. The guarantee of future universal victory.

— "It is the Spirit of the Lord which, when poured out, inclines the heart to appreciate aright God's marvellous grace, and so produces repentance. The same Spirit in the heart is also the earnest to assure the children of God that their now reconciled Father will hide His face from them no more. May the promise of the full outpouring of the blessed Spirit in the latter days on both Israel and the Church be soon realised; and for this end may the spirit of prayer more and more pervade all the professing disciples of the Lord Jesus!"—*Fausset.*

— "Which as a Spirit of truth shall enlighten their minds, and make them wise unto salvation; as a Spirit of grace shall regenerate and create them anew; as a Spirit of power shall strengthen them for every duty and enable them to withstand and conquer every temptation; as a Spirit of holiness shall cleanse them from sin, sanctify their souls, and stamp them with Mine image; and as a Spirit of adoption and consolation shall inspire them with confidence and hope, and render every branch of obedience and every exercise of piety and virtue sweet and delightful to them."—*Benson.*

— "The true Israel, the people of the Spirit. The outpouring of the Spirit of Jehovah is the end of all the ways which He has gone with Israel in anger and compassion, and the consummation of Israel in the Christian Church."—*Lange.*

"The deliverance of the Hebrews was wrought out in a most remarkable manner. Mattathias, raising the standard of patriotism, called around him the pious portion of his countrymen. His party increased rapidly till they became a considerable army. He appointed his third and bravest son Judas military commander, by whom the Syrian generals that were sent against him were defeated. In battle after battle he proved victorious. Even the army which Lysias sent into Judea could not stand before him. Though composed of thirty thousand foot and seven thousand cavalry, and increased by auxiliaries from the provinces, it proved powerless before him. Putting the enemy to flight, he secured immense booty. The like success attended him the following year, when he defeated an army of sixty thousand men, made himself master of several strong cities, and, retaking Jerusalem, purified the Temple and restored its solemn services. His brothers, Simon and Jonathan, proved themselves worthy successors of this devoted patriot; the independence of the Jews was finally secured, and the royal dignity vested in the Asmonæan family, in which it continued till the time of Herod the Great."—*Henderson.*

The Vision of the Restored Temple and the Reinhabited Land. (Chaps. xl.–xlviii.)

This is a development of the promise contained in chapter xxxvii. 27. The subject of the closing chapters of Ezekiel is the restitution of the kingdom of God. This is expressed by a vision in which are displayed not only a rebuilt Temple, but also by a reformed priesthood, reorganised services, a restored monarchy, a reapportioned territory, a renewed people, and, as a consequence, the diffusion of fertility and plenty over the whole earth. The return from Babylon was indeed the beginning of this work, but only a beginning, introductory to the future kingdom of God, first upon earth, finally in heaven. The vision must therefore be viewed as strictly symbolical, the symbols employed being the Mosaic ordinances. These ordinances had indeed in themselves a hidden meaning. The Tabernacle in the midst of the tents of the tribes, and afterwards the Temple in the capital of the land of inheritance, was intended to signify the dwelling of Jehovah among His people; the priesthood was to

denote the mediation between God and man; the monarchy the sovereignty of God, the people the saints of God, the territory their inheritance. So that the symbols here employed have an essential propriety; yet they are truly symbols, and as such they are to be regarded."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

THE IDEAL TEMPLE OF THE FUTURE. (Chap. xl.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**In the five and twentieth year.**" The fiftieth year from the 18th of Josiah, the year of his memorable passover (2 Kings xxii. 12). The jubilee year began with the month of Tisri, on the tenth day of which was the day of atonement. God allowed the prophet to see the Temple and the future freedom of Israel on the day of jubilee because then servants became free, and on the day of atonement because then the sins of Israel are forgiven. "**In the fourteenth year after the city was smitten, in the self-same day.**" The desolation of the Temple, city, and commonwealth is here recalled in vivid contrast to the glorious restoration that is to be.

Ver. 2. "**Set me upon a very high mountain**"—Moriah, very high as compared with the plains of Babylon, still more so as to its moral elevation (chaps. xvii. 22; xx. 40).—"**By which was as the frame of a city.**" It is not a city which is seen, but a building—the Temple and its courts—like a city in its construction, surrounded by massive walls.

Ver. 3. "**Behold, there was a man.**" The Old Testament manifestation of heavenly beings as *men* prepared men's minds for the coming incarnation.—"**Like the appearance of brass.**" Brightly shining—resplendent.—"**With a line of flax**"—for long measurements—measuring the ground-plan.—"**And a measuring reed**"—used in measuring houses. It marked the straightness of the walls. To measure implied a separation to sacred purposes.

Ver. 5. "**By the cubit and a hand-breadth.**" Measures were mostly taken from the human body. The greater cubit, the length from the elbow to the end of the middle finger, a little more than two feet; exceeding the ordinary cubit, from the elbow to the wrist, by a hand-breadth—*i.e.*, twenty-one inches in all. The palm was the full breadth of the hand, three and a half inches. "**The breadth of the building.**" The boundary wall. The height and breadth of this will are given, but not the length, which is determined hereafter, and shown to enclose a square, a side of which is 500 cubits.

Ver. 6. "**The gate which looketh toward the east.**" This is particularly described, all the other gate-buildings being exactly like it. The east gate was to be especially sacred, as it was through it the glory of God had departed (chap. xi. 23), and through it the glory was to return (chaps. xliii. 1, 2; xliv. 2, 3).

Ver. 7. "**And every little chamber was**"—guard-chambers, for the use of the Levites who watched at the Temple gates, and for depositing utensils and musical instruments. In our translation the words *was* and *were* are continually introduced, but are not in the original. They would be better away. The substantives depend upon the verb *measured* throughout.

Ver. 9. "**And the posts thereof**"—a projection like the ram's horn. Hence in architecture a column projecting from the wall with its base, shaft, and capital, or it may be the base only, as in verses 16, 49.

Ver. 14. "**He made also.**" The angel is exhibiting a newly constructed building, and therefore is said to make it.

"**Narrow windows**"—closed with

network—the jambs sloping towards the opening. The ancients had no glass, so they had the windows latticed—narrow in the interior of the walls and widening at the exterior. This however, though common in later styles, is not in accordance with the architecture, in which all the lines were straight and the spaces rectangular. **"Likewise to the arches"** — the porches. The arch was at this time unknown in architecture. The word probably denotes a hall or colonnade of posts, as in verse 14.

Ver. 17. **"A pavement made for the court"**—tesselated mosaic. This pavement came up to the sides of the gate-buildings, and was carried along the sides of the court parallel to the boundary-wall, thus forming a border of forty-four cubits to the court.

Ver. 18. **"The lower pavement."** The outer court being lower than the inner, the pavement running round, it was naturally called the lower pavement, to distinguish it from the pavement of the inner court.

Vers. 20–28. The north and south gates were of precisely the same dimensions as the eastern gate. In the case of the two other gates no mention is made of a building with thirty chambers, such as was found on the east side. Only one was needed, and it was assigned to the east as being the sacred quarter, and that most conveniently situated for the officiating priests.

Ver. 31. **"The arches thereof"**—the porches, the columned hall. **"And the going up to it had eight steps."** From the precincts to the outer court were *seven* steps, from the outer to the inner court *eight*, making together the number of the Psalms (Ps. cxx.–cxxxiv.), supposed by some to have been called Psalms of Degrees because they were sung by the choir of Levites upon the steps (*degrees*) of the Temple courts.

Ver. 38. **"By the posts of the gates."** By the pillars which were in front and along the sides of the gate-building. Gates must here be used for the gates proper, of which there were more than one in the gate-building.

Ver. 39. **"In the porch."** Not under the covered portico, which was only ten cubits broad, but in the angles formed by the porch and gate front.

Ver. 43. **"And within were hooks"**—cooking apparatus for cooking the flesh of the sacrifices that fell to the priests. The hooks were fastened in the walls within the apartment, to hang the meat from, so as to roast it.

Ver. 44. **"The chambers of the singers."** These were Levites of particular families, those of Heman, Asaph, and Merari, whose genealogy is carefully traced up to Levi in 1 Chron. vi. 31.

Ver. 45. **"The keepers of the charge of the house"**—the priests who keep watch as guards of the Temple.

Ver. 46. **"The keepers of the charge of the altar: the sons of Zadok."** The priests were all descended from one or other of the two sons of Aaron—Eleazar and Ithamar. David distributed the priestly offices between the families of Zadok, the representative of Eleazar, and Ahimelech, the representative of Ithamar. The high-priesthood had for many years been in the line of Ithamar, to which Eli belonged; but Solomon, removing Abiathar from the high-priesthood because of the part he took in the rebellion of Adonijah, and appointing Zadok, restored this office to the family of Eleazar. The priests who had charge of the sacrifices were distinguished from the rest of the Levitical priests as they "which come near to the Lord to minister unto Him."

Ver. 48. **"The porch of the house."** The new chapter should begin at this verse, as here the seer passes from the

court to the Temple itself, beginning with the porch. The front of the Temple porch consisted of a central opening with two columns on either side.

Ver. 49. "By the steps"—ten steps (lxx.), as in the later Temple. "Pillars by the posts"—literally, to the posts, meaning that upon the bases (*posts*) stood shafts (*pillars*).

HOMILETICS.

A Divinely Inspired Seer.

(Vers. 1–4.)

The concluding vision of the prophet is not the least striking in the magnificent series. The poetical conception is full of boldness and grandeur, though the details are wrought out with prosaic minuteness of literalness. It is quite in keeping with the graphic style of this sublime prophet of the captivity. Ezekiel bursts upon the scene like the storm-cloud described in his first prophecy; the progress of his visions dazzles us like the revolving chromatic lights in the midst of the moving cloud, until the storm is spent, the cloud melts into space, and so much of the light remains as reveals the splendours of a city, Temple, and commonwealth illumined with the unfading glory of an ever-present God. He writes as a Jew and a priest familiar from his earliest days to the time of his opening manhood with the scenes of the Temple-worship in his ever-loved Jerusalem. The materials of his visions are drawn from the experience of his youth, when impressions are clearest and most indelible. His conception of the Temple of the future is therefore an enlargement of the one he had seen and known on Mount Moriah; for the human mind cannot create anything out of nothing, but can only contrast, combine, and expand from something that already exists. And the glory of future Messianic times will exceed that of the present, as the glowing picture now presented by the prophet transcended the scene of deplorable desolation that then reigned over the land of promise. Like all the other visions, the one we are now to consider was intended to comfort and inspirit the disconsolate Jews, and to light up the gloom of their captivity with the well-founded hope of a brighter and better day. The rarest blessings—blessings that form a new epoch in the outgrowth of religious experience—often come to God's people in the hour of their most abject misery. We are sometimes humbled that we may gather strength to bear more meekly the weight of a loftier exaltation. Observe—

I. **That a Divinely inspired Seer retains the use of his natural faculties in intensified clearness.** 1. *He is conscious of a lofty mental elevation.* "The hand of the Lord was upon me, brought me into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain" (vers. 1, 2). Genius is something distinct from Divine inspiration. Genius is a species of inspiration; it generates its own inspiration. It is the gift of God, and imposes on its possessor a responsibility for its legitimate use proportioned to its quality. Where ordinary talent advances by slow degrees, genius soars on rapid wing. But Divine inspiration is the mind of God acting for the time being on the mind of man for a special and definite purpose. Whatever genius or talent man possesses, it is raised by contact with the Divine Spirit and made the vehicle of the Divine purpose. The man is still conscious that he is himself, while he is also conscious he is but the instrument, for the time being, of a superior power. 2. *He is clearly cognisant of matters of fact.* Ezekiel is not so far carried away out of himself, or fascinated by the brilliance of the visions of God, as to overlook that it was

"in the five and twentieth year of the captivity, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was smitten" (ver. 1). Divine inspiration does not destroy or supersede, but strengthens and clarifies our common-sense. It allows room for the free-play of individual peculiarities. It preserves the truth communicated inviolate, in its human setting. It does not do for man what he can do for himself. Hence the inspired books of the Bible bear the impress of the writers' strongly marked individuality.

II. **That the Divinely inspired Seer is favoured with extraordinary visions.** 1. *He sees in outline a magnificent city-temple.* "The frame of a city on the south" (ver. 2). Precisely in this direction would the former city and Temple appear to any one approaching them from the north. He saw the picture or model of a temple as vast as a city; it is a city for men to dwell in; it is a temple for God to dwell in. To his priestly predilections the building is all temple, occupying a space and presenting a grandeur of ritual exceeding anything hitherto known in Jewish history. The highest conception to Ezekiel of the future glory of Israel was a great temple with a perfect form of worship. The loftiest vision of the latest New Testament seer is that of a city in which there is no temple, but where God is Himself the temple and the light and glory of the whole (Rev. xxi. 22, 23). "Accustomed to cities, we raise a great city of God in our imaginations of the future, just as in an age or region where cities were unknown we might have pictured heaven as a garden like Eden."—*Geikie.* 2. *He is brought into the presence of an instructor possessing rare endowments.* "Whose appearance was like the appearance of brass"—shining with the lustre of superior gifts: "with a line of flax in his hand and a measuring reed"—instruments for conveying exact knowledge (ver. 3). This being is identified by the New Testament seer as Christ, the sovereign architect of His own Church (Rev. i. 13–15; xi. 1). Such a person might well be introduced with an *ecce*—"Behold a man" (ver. 3). All the details of the vision that followed were imparted by this heavenly messenger, and become intelligible only as he enlightens and instructs the mind of the beholder. The inspiration of the Divine Spirit brings the soul into the immediate presence of God and lights up the revealed word with a Divine meaning. Then it is that the lines of right and wrong stand out in clear and startling contrast.

III. **That a Divinely inspired Seer is required to exercise his best powers to understand the meaning of the subjects revealed** (ver. 4). Not only are the outward and inward senses to be on the alert, but all are to be earnestly concentrated upon the devout study of the truth. It is surprising how much can be seen in a subject that engages our affections. Love quickens and illumines all our sensibilities. "Love sees not with the eyes, but with the mind." Inspiration helps but does not displace our natural faculties. Mental and spiritual insight are gained by the diligent exercise of our powers (Heb. v. 14). Nature reveals its greatest secrets only to the industrious. The world is full of endless suggestiveness to the wakeful and resolute student.

IV. **The Divinely inspired Seer is commissioned to freely and fully communicate his knowledge for the benefit of others.** "Declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel" (ver. 4). We may not tell all we learn from others, but we may safely declare *all* we learn from God: there is nothing to conceal; nothing but what will be the better for telling. We have never mastered a subject until we can talk about it intelligently and forcibly. Whatever knowledge has been helpful to ourselves should be communicated for the good of others. Knowledge that is not freely circulated is valueless; it is so

much useless lumber; and the mind, like an overloaded boat, is in constant danger of being swamped. The most highly gifted teacher delights to give of his best, and is often as modestly unconscious that he is doing so as the loveliest flower is unconscious of the beauty it displays and the delicious perfume it scatters. The man who is Divinely inspired to see a truth is irresistibly impelled to make it known.

LESSONS.—1. *The grandest truths are Divinely revealed.* 2. *The revelations of God are not appreciated without diligent study.* 3. *The superior knowledge of the few is intended for the good of the many.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–4. "We observe so far a resemblance between the commencement and the close of the book, that in each alike the prophet is borne away by a Divine hand and placed amid the visions of God. There are, however, two characteristic differences between the earlier and the later. First, in respect to the region where these ideal manifestations of Divine truth and glory were given—formerly on the banks of the Chebar, as if the glory of Jehovah had forsaken its old haunts; and now on what was emphatically the mount of God, as if He were again returned thither and had already raised it to a far nobler elevation. The substance of the visions, too, very strikingly differs; for, while that on the Chebar was fitted chiefly to awaken thoughts of terror and solemn awe, this was calculated to produce feelings of the liveliest confidence and the most exalted hopes. The heavens seemed now cleared of all their stormier elements and were radiant with the sunshine of the Divine favour."—*Fairbairn.*

— "The vision beginning here and continued to the end of this book is one impossible as yet to understand fully, and for the clear explanation of which we must wait until the event makes the whole plain. There are difficulties about a *literal* interpretation; but these may all vanish when the fulfilment takes place: and there is the difficulty about explaining the whole *figuratively*, that thus the minute and accurate details seem meaningless and needless, whereas faith assures us that all the most minute parts of God's Word have their purpose and aim."—*Fausset.*

— "There is nothing in Holy Scripture that is not useful and profitable, though at first sight it may seem otherwise. Metals lie hid in hardest quarries; wholesome herbs are found oft in roughest places, and precious stones in barren sands. Hippocrates says that in the faculty of physic there is nothing small, nothing contemptible. Aristotle says, in all nature nothing is so mean, vile, and abject that deserves not to be admired; and the Rabbins have a saying that a mountain of sense hangs on every apex of the Word of God."—*Trapp.*

— Divine Communications to Man. "1. *The Lord keeps an exact account of the time of His Church and people's suffering* (ver. 1). He is the best and most punctual chronologer of all in heaven and earth. Men and angels may mistake, misreckon, but the Lord doth not, cannot. When we are in misery we think God forgets us (Ps. lxxix. 5; lxxxix. 46); but He takes notice of every hour, day, month, and year. 2. *When the Church is low, in the worst, most desperate and deplorable condition, even then the Lord hath a care of His Church* (ver. 1). When the Church is in the wilderness, under persecution in Egypt or Babylon, the Lord is solicitous for it. 3. *The Church is Mount Zion, or Mount Zion is the Church wherein God makes known His mind for the comfort of His people* (ver. 2). Mountains are high, conspicuous, and strong, and so is the Church; on

mountains is good air, so likewise is in the Church; hills are nearer heaven than other places; they are below, the Church is above the world. 4. *The Church is well seated and well ordered.* 'Upon which was the frame of a city' (ver. 2). It is seated upon a mountain, the mountain of God's decree, power, and truth; it is well ordered, for it is as the frame of a city, where everything is in its right place and all fitly joined together. 5. *The Man Christ, who is sinless and glorious, is the chief builder and exact measurer of the Church and things belonging to it* (ver. 4). The line and reed are in His hand; He measures all the trees and stones used in this building, the outward and inward courts, with all their appurtenances. He was the son of Joseph, a carpenter, and some mystery might lie in that. 6. *The way into Zion and unto the Father is by Christ* (ver. 3). He stands in the gate of the Temple ready to receive any that should come and be found fit for entrance: He had His line and reed in His hand to measure them. None unmeasured might enter. 7. *The Lord Jesus, when Divine things are presented to us, would have us attent, intent, and apply the whole heart unto them* (ver. 4). Let us mind, and mind to purpose, all things shown us of Christ; let us set our senses and whole heart upon them. 8. *What the Lord Christ reveals unto His servants, the prophets and ministers, they must not reserve to themselves, but communicate to others for their instruction, edification, and comfort.* 'Declare all that thou seest' (ver. 4). They must not only utter what they receive, but utter all they receive (Acts xx. 27)."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 1. "The Word of God counts the years and months and days of our distress to make us understand that it is not unknown to God how long we have borne the yoke of the cross and the oppression of tyrants."—*Starck.*

— "Ezekiel was already five-and-twenty years in a foreign land. We must be prepared and purified in many ways by God's Spirit before we can rightly understand the consolations of God; and one grows in God when one learns under present sufferings to see more and more of the eternal comfort."—*Diedrich.*

— "The vision of the Temple a trilogy of thoughts. 1. From judgment to mercy. 2. From prison to freedom. 3. From the world to Christ and into the community of God."—*Lange.*

Ver. 2. **The Visions of God**—1. Need a highly sensitised spirituality to appreciate. 2. Are on a scale of unexampled magnificence. 3. Have a close connection with the supreme interests of humanity. 4. Are a revelation of His character and purposes. 5. Should be reverently and earnestly contemplated. 6. Elevate the spectator to a lofty moral standard.

— "To human eyes Canaan was lost for Israel, to human eyes Jerusalem lay in the dust; but the prophet sees it again far more glorious. Such seeing is truly given by God in the Spirit. Land, city, and Temple had been lost through the sins of the people; yet Israel must remain and fulfil its eternal purpose for the glory of God. A fairer and loftier Jerusalem and Temple must be still in store for Israel, which the prophet represents entirely by figures taken from the old land, the old royal seat, and the old Temple. Yet he does not merely make the old be renewed; everything becomes quite different in order to indicate that the Kingdom of God will in its completion present a quite different figure."—*Diedrich.*

— "The land of Israel is the hieroglyph of the inheritance which God will give to His people from the whole world, which, in contrast thereto, is called the sea or the wilderness."—*Lange.*

— "This is indeed a place to sit down in and meditate. Jerusalem in the old covenant, the Jerusalem which is the Christian Church and the Jerusalem above—what a theme for contemplation throughout time and eternity!—Jerusalem a Sabbatic place in the working days of the world's history."—*Lange.*

Ver. 3. The Architect of the Divine

Temple — 1. Is illumined with the lustre of His unique qualifications. "Whose appearance was like the appearance of brass." 2. Possesses the means of constructing an exact and symmetrical building. "With a line of flax in his hand and a measuring reed." 3. Has absolute control of the structure which He rears. "He stood in the gate." 4. Is Himself an illustrious pattern of the glorious edifice into which man may be morally built up (Eph. ii. 20–22).

— "Like bright polished brass which strongly reflected the rays of light. Probably he had a nimbus or glory round his head. This was either an angel, or, as some think, a personal appearance of our blessed Lord."—*A. Clarke.*

— "With a line in his hand and a measuring reed." **The Law of God**—1. Is the unchanging standard of moral actions. 2. Regulates the form and constitution of the Church. 3. Is unerringly applied by the hand of the great Master Builder in every stage of the Church's upbuilding. 4. Is clearly defined in the Divinely inspired Word.

— "The measurements are — 1. *Exact*, to show that the promise is not vague, but certain. 2. *Equal*, to denote harmony. 3. *Vast*, to mark majesty and grandeur. The extraordinary massiveness of the walls may have had reference to the enormous structures raised at this time by Nebuchadnezzar, who was not only the greatest conqueror but the greatest builder in the world."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

— "Let every man examine himself by this measuring-rod how far he has advanced."—*Gregory.*

— "Christ is indeed the foundation and corner-stone of His Church; but He is also the Builder, and brings the building erected thereon always more and more to perfection. The brass signifies holiness and purity, also life and permanent strength. Christ is the strong and invincible Hero."—*Lange.*

— "He stood in the gate." Elsewhere also Christ stands at the door and calls, invites in, shows the way and opens the entrance to the Temple and into the inner sanctury.

Ver. 4. **High Spiritual Attainments** —1. Not reached without the diligent exercise of all our powers. 2. The outward senses are the gateways of spiritual knowledge. 3. Only that which affects the heart interests and influences the whole man. 4. High spiritual attainments the best qualification for instructing others.

— "This building of Ezekiel's is not to be understood of a new material building, but, like the chariot at the beginning and also the building at the end, is nothing else than the Kingdom of Christ, the holy Church of Christendom here on earth even to the last day. But how all the parts are to be properly interpreted and placed, that we will defer until we shall see the whole building prepared and ready. Although it is a mystery, it ought not to remain a mystery."—*Lange.*

— "The threefold summons to attention intimates that a matter is here treated of which is of the greatest importance to the community of God. To this it is essential that faith in the indestructibility of the Kingdom of God, and in its resurrection from every death, live in it in full power. It is this alone which is here treated of, however dense may be the veil of architectural details behind which it is concealed."—*Hengstenberg.*

HOMILETICS.

The Church of God a Building.

(Vers. 5–49.)

I. Strongly guarded. "Behold a wall on the outside of the house round about" (ver. 5). The first and second Temples were surrounded by a massive

wall. This wall denoted not only the separation of the Church from the world, but also the Divine power that protected the Church at every point. The Lord is said to be a wall of fire and a shield encompassing and guarding His people (Zech. ii. 5; Ps. v. 12). Both the pre-and-post-exilian Temples have perished; but the Church of God remains, and is more firmly established than ever. The Lord is its invulnerable defence.

II. Accessible to every sincere inquirer. There are ample gates east, north, and south (vers. 6–19, 20–23, 24–26, 32–35). 1. *There are gates to show that all are welcome.* From whatever quarter they come, the gates are invitingly open. All earnest seekers after God, of whatever nationality, may find an entrance into the Divine Temple (Matt. viii. 11). 2. *There are gates, to indicate that only those who come by those gates can be admitted.* The Lord of the Temple has the absolute right to formulate His own conditions of entrance. There is to be a moral fitness in the applicant (Rev. xxi. 27). None who come with a broken and contrite heart—a sense of self-helplessness and need—shall be turned away (Ps. xxxiv. 18; John vi. 37).

III. Suffused with light. There are windows, narrow without, but widened within to diffuse the light more copiously (ver. 16). The little chambers had windows: so little Churches, little saints, have their measure of light. The Church of God is the light and instructor of the world (Matt. v. 14). If that light were quenched, myriads would be doomed to grope their aimless way in hopeless darkness. The Church is bright and clear only as it is constantly bathed in the light of God.

IV. With ample provision for acts of highest worship. 1. *There is the altar of sacrifice* (vers. 47, 39–43). The sacrifices were intended to point out the desert of sin, the need of repentance and expiation, to acknowledge that the goods of the offerer belonged to God, and to be a type and memorial of the coming sacrifice of Christ to be offered once for all. They were a pledge of the sincerity of the worshipper. There is no true worship without sacrifice. 2. *There is the offering of praise.* There is a special place in the Temple for the singers (ver. 44). The music was assigned to the Levites, and to those Israelites of note whose daughters had married into the priesthood. But these Israelites were allowed to take part only in the instrumental part of the service; the vocal part was sung by the Levites only. Wind and stringed instruments were used—trumpets, pipes or hautboys, viols, lutes, harps, and cymbals. Psalms were sung and were arranged according to the character of the service, on ordinary or special occasions. Music reaches its highest consecration when it is devoted to the worship of God. Praise is the essence of true worship. 3. *There is the duty of prayer* (vers. 45, 46). Prayers were offered by the priests at the morning and evening services, and were expressed in well-known and constantly repeated forms, in some of which prayers the people joined the priests. After prayers, they rehearsed the ten commandments and repeated the portions of the Law written on their phylacteries. The phylactery sentences were repeated daily, the time of the morning at which this duty was to begin being stated by the Jewish Rabbis as "from such time as a man can see to distinguish between blue and green, even until sunrising." The chambers of the priests were conveniently situated for their duties. It was their privilege to come near to the Lord to minister unto Him (ver. 46). Prayer brings the soul into the immediate presence of God, and is an essential element in genuine worship.

V. With an imposing and conspicuous entrance. "The porch of the house" (vers. 48, 49). The porch was an elevated building, rising higher than the

Temple itself, and was approached by a flight of steps. It was a prominent and imposing object as soon as you entered the inner court, or court of sacrifice. It admitted to the Holy Place, and led ultimately to the most Holy Place. While the porch seemed to invite the worshipper to enter, it also taught that we are not to rush into the Divine presence with indecent haste, but draw near thoughtfully and by slow and solemn stages—passing first through the outer court, then the inner, and through the porch into the house itself. Christ is the door of the heavenly Temple (John x. 9; Rev. iv. 1), and through Him the soul is conducted into the midst of its imperishable treasures and endless revelations.

LESSONS.—1. *The Church of God is securely founded in unchanging truth.* 2. *Is composed of indestructible material.* 3. *Invites all men to share in its privileges.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 5. **The Divine Protection**—1. Surrounds the Church like a wall. 2. Is invincible. 3. Secures the everlasting safety of the faithful. 4. Cannot be pleaded as an excuse for personal unfaithfulness.

— "The Church has a triple wall—1 God as protection. 2. The angels as guardians. 3. Believers—in other words, their prayers."—*A. Lapide.*

— "The object of the wall is to draw the boundary between the sacred and the profane. This boundary had a double meaning. To the community it was a warning not to draw near the sanctuary with unrenewed hearts. With respect to God, it guaranteed that He would eventually separate His people from the world. Because the people of God had neglected the warning implied in the boundary, as a just punishment the boundary was also in the latter respect destroyed. To the desecration as guilt succeeded the desecration as punishment. In the pierced wall, the smitten city lay an image of the abandonment of the people of God to the world. That this relation will be altered again in the future, that God will again raise His reformed people to independence, is figured by the erection of the new wall, which in this respect is an embodiment of God's help and grace that are to be imparted to the covenant-people renewed in spirit."—*Hengstenberg.*

— "A measuring-reed of six cubits long by the cubit and a hand-breadth. The larger measure of the sanctuary—1. From the love wherewith God loves us. 2. According to the love wherewith we ought in return to love God in the brethren."—*Cocceius.*

Ver. 6. "And went up the stairs thereof." (See also vers. 22, 26, 31, 34, 37, 49). **Progress in Divine Things.** "1. *We come to the knowledge of spiritual things by degrees; they are not known at once, but successively.* Temple mysteries we come unto by steps. Christ leads His people on from one thing to another, from faith to faith, from strength to strength. 2. *The knowledge of Divine things is not attained without labour and difficulty.* There are steps and stairs in this Temple, and those that will behold the glory and understand the mysteries of it must go upward, first one step and then another. It is difficult to go up steps and stairs. 3. *In Temple work we must make progress.* It is not sufficient to go up a step or two and then stand still or descend: we must go forward, higher, to the top. Christ overcame all difficulties; He went up all the stairs, and persevering to the end, was crowned (Rev. iii. 21)."—*Greenhill.*

— "When believers enter they have—1. A guide with them into all truth. 2. Without Him they can do nothing. 3. Progress is made toward full knowledge of God and Christ."—*Cocceius.*

— "The east gate as model and

pattern gate in its homiletical significance: every sermon ought to lead to the Father through Christ."

— "The Jews called the east the fore-part of heaven; the west the back-part: by the first they denote spiritual things; by the second temporal and earthly things. Those that come into this Temple must mind spiritual things; they must not let out their hearts to the world and worldly delights—they are western things, and there was no door in the west. They must go upwards, not downwards; keep within, not go out."—*Greenhill.*

— "One must not so thoughtlessly imagine that only a single leap is required to come into heaven, but constant ascent is requisite and necessary in order to seek after the things that are above."

Ver. 7. **The Chambers of the Temple**—"1. Represent the mansions which are in heaven. 2. The entertainment, rest, and comfort the saints enjoy in the Church under Christ. 3. The several congregations, or churches, of Gospel times, be they little or great, all which are in the Church of Christ, as these chambers were in this visional Temple."—*Greenhill.*

— In the Lord's House are many mansions, according to the distinction of offices and gifts: each mansion serves to ornament the house.

Ver. 8. "The porch reminds us of the peace and repose connected with the consciousness of the grace of God."—*Œcolampadius.*

— "Truly they who are preparing for the holy office of the ministry are measured in many ways, and they should still further test themselves by the measure of the sanctuary."—*Starck.*

Vers. 13–15. "Thus those who are in this way are walled around, covered and protected on all sides; so that nothing can befall them in Him who is the Door and the Way, but everything leads forward to the sanctuary when we walk in Christ Jesus."—*Cocceius.*

Ver. 16. **The Light of the Church**—1. Is borrowed light that comes through the windows of its ordinances. 2. An evidence of its joyous experiences (Ps. xcvii. 11). 3. A testimony to the world wrapped in moral darkness.

— "By these windows is signified the spiritual light which should be in the Church of Christ. He is called The Sun (Mal. iv. 2), A Great Light (Isa. ix. 2), and The Light of the World (John viii. 12). And by those windows—the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—He hath and still doth let in light into the Church. The least churches and the least saints shall not be without windows; they shall have light and joy, teaching and comfort."—*Greenhill.*

— "In the Church of God darkness has no place, but the light of truth and faith shines everywhere; yea, believers themselves are a light in the Lord, whose works shine before men. They who walk in the ways of the Lord have the true, cheerful and clear light; while the natural soul is a gateway without windows."—*Lange.*

Vers. 17–19. **The Outer and Inner Courts of the Temple.** "In the outward court the people stood; and it represented the nations outside the Church. The inward court represented the Church, where the Word of God enlightens and nourishes us, and Christ is our altar of perfumes. The Holy of Holies represented heaven; into it the high priest only entered—typifying our High Priest, the Lord Jesus, His entrance in there alone by His own power, to bring us thither. So that the first signified the state of nature; the second the state of grace; the third the state of glory. Hereby the greatness of the Church in the time of the Gospel, and especially in the time of the New Jerusalem, is pointed out. These courts were of great compass, and had gates looking to the several parts of the world."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 17. "Those who are employed in God's House ought to keep even

their feet clean, for holiness is the ornament of His House."—*Starck.*

Ver. 20. "By the diversity of the gates you may recognise the diversity of those who enter. As in our cathedrals every part tells something to the deeper-seeing connoisseur, so this is still more the case in Ezekiel's Temple. Everything here is in harmony and mutual correspondence, like the Old and the New Testaments, Moses and Christ, the prophets and the apostles."—*Lange.*

Ver. 24. When we are in Temple work, we must move according to the mind of the Master Builder, and not of our own heads.

Ver. 28. "The courts are separated, for the covenant of Abraham is one thing, the covenant of Moses another, and the covenant of Christ still another. Yet they only mutually confirm one another. For are not the contents of the covenant the promises of God, who graciously forgives sin? One court, however, is nearer than another to the sanctuary. Walkest thou unhindered in the court of the priests, busied with spiritual sacrifices; then thank the Lord, and extend the hand to others that by thy support they may overcome difficulties."—*Œcolampadius.*

Ver. 31. "And the going up to it had eight steps." (See also vers. 34, 37, 49; comp. with vers. 22, 26). **A Step Higher**—1. An important qualification for every leader of religious thought. 2. Should be the constant ambition of every student of Scripture truth. 3. Should mark the steady advance of individual spiritual experience.

Ver. 37. "The people that came thither were to be holy, but the priests who came into the inner court were to be more holy. They who are nearest God should be most holy; they are to be a step at least above others."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 38. "This signifies that our hearts may remain unclean, even when we give our bodies to be burned for the glory of God. The constant mortification of the flesh must ground itself on Christ, otherwise we will lose courage.—The believing soul presents its heart, as one sets a table, on which Christ as sacrifice is beheld, for faith lays hold of this alone."—*Lange.*

Vers. 39–43. **A Place of Sacrifice**—1. May be found everywhere. 2. Essential to acceptable worship. 3. A constant reminder of sin. 4. Constantly points to the All-efficacious Sacrifice.

— It is not to be imagined that under the times of Christ the Jewish worship should be revived. These expositions of tables, offerings, and sacrifices import some other thing—the good and plentiful provision which should be in the Gospel Church.

— "The return to literal sacrifices would seem to be a return to the beggarly elements of legal types after we have got the antitype. We are sure, therefore, that the Temple-sacrifices in restored Jerusalem, of whatever nature they may be, will not set aside the fixed principle that the one sacrifice of Christ is final and complete. Two considerations may help to lessen the difficulty. 1. The Jews, as a nation, stand to God in a peculiar relation, distinct from that of Christians of the present elect Church, gathered out of Jews and Gentiles indiscriminately. The same principle, therefore, of the non-existence of sacrifice in any form may not hold good in that dispensation to be ushered in by the advent of Messiah and His reign over the restored Israelite nation as holds good in our present Gentile times. That shall be the period of public liturgy, or perfect outward worship of the great congregation on earth, as the present time is one of gathering out spiritual worshippers one by one. Besides Israel's relation to Christ as her spiritual Saviour, she will then also perform a perfect outward service of sacrifice, prayer, and praise, as a nation, to her manifested Divine King reigning

in the midst of her; and all nations of the earth shall take a part in that service as recognising His Divine Kingship over them also. 2. The Israelites shall probably also set forth, in all its harmonious parts, the outward beauty and inward sanctity of the Temple-service, which in their palmiest days of old they had never exhibited in its full perfection. The full excellence and antitypical perfection of all the parts of the ancient Temple-service, which, from ignorance of its hidden meaning, seemed a cumbersome yoke and unintelligible to the worshipper, shall then be fully understood, and therefore shall become a delightful service of love, instead of, as formerly, a burdensome task. Israel's province will be to exhibit, in the minutest details of sacrifice, the essential unity of the Law and Gospel, which now seem opposed. The ideal of the theocratic Temple and its service shall then first be realised."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 44. "These set out the spiritual joy and songs which should be in the Church of Christ (Isa. lxv. 14, 17, 18). In this Jerusalem will be a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual praise (1 Pet. ii. 5). Conquerors are full of joy and much in singing praises, especially spiritual conquerors."—*Greenhill.*

— "A place in the House of God is justly due to them who sing the praise of God in spiritual and heavenly songs, which contribute so powerfully to spiritual edification. In these corrupt days music is used more for sin and vanity than for the praise of God. When will it be free from this service to vanity? He who draws near to God sings to Him also in His heart: they sing best who in the midst of troubles are full of joy. They incite others to sing."—*Lange.*

— "That the singers are here so prominent is explained by this, that in the exalted position of the community of God more ample material was given them for new songs, so that the singing in the worship of the new Temple must play a chief part, as indeed the multiplication of the singers and musicians under David stood connected with the advance which the people of God had then made. Even in the times soon after the return from the exile singing revived in a degree that had not been since David."—*Hengstenberg.*

Vers. 45, 46. "By these priests may be understood the ministers of the Gospel who have charge of the holy things and persons (1 Tim. vi. 13, 14; Acts xx. 28). They are the watchmen; the charge of souls is committed to them, and they must be accountants for them (Heb. xiii. 17). So true Christians are priests in this Temple, and some have charge of the holy things and persons therein (Rev. v. 10)."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 46. **The Priestly Office**—1. Gains its distinction more by moral fitness than sacerdotal lineage. 2. A solemn responsibility. 3. Brings the ministrant into the immediate presence of God. 4. Is the honoured privilege of the truly godly.

— "Since 'sons of Zadok' is in our language equivalent to 'sons of righteousness,' this implies that only those duly keep the charge who are justified by faith and born of God, whom Jesus Christ has begotten and upholds by the word of His power."—*Œcolampadius.*

Ver. 47. "Christ doeth all things in His Church in number, weight, and measure. By His Spirit He ordereth the length, breadth, and depth of His spiritual House, and bestoweth His gifts by measure to each member (Rom. xii.; 2 Cor. x.; Ephes. iii. 4)."—*Trapp.*

— "The true Temple is the body of Christ as He took it out of the grave on the third day, for it surpasses all figures and is pure life. The prophet here prophesies of it; but he does so in lisping words, and for the sake of his contemporaries his understanding of Christ in these chapters, where he speaks of Christ's Kingdom and sanctuary, is still in swaddling-clothes."—*Diedrich.*

Vers. 48, 49. "The porch of the house." **The Entrance to the Church.**—1. Stands invitingly open to the penitent. 2. Must be passed to enjoy the highest spiritual privileges. 3. Is broad enough to admit the worst who are truly contrite, and narrow enough to exclude the incorrigible. 4. A joyous spectacle to angels and God when thronged with sincere inquirers.

Ver. 48. "It was of the nature of the porch to be open, being an open approach to a space that is or may be closed, which shelters from the inclemency of the weather those who must wait for the opening. A door is not mentioned here, as otherwise generally in the closed rooms of the Temple. The words, 'three cubits on this side, and three cubits on that,' indicate that an open space was left in the midst. In the porches of the court, that had a large thoroughfare, the whole space within must have been open."—*Hengstenberg.*

— Christ is a porch to His people. Jerome once said that while we are in this life we are in a porch-state. Here we have a body of death, see all things imperfectly; but when we enter into the heavenly Temple we shall be free, and know as we are known.

Ver. 49. "There were pillars, one on this side and another on that." "The proportion in height agrees with the thickness of the corner pillars, which in the court amounts only to two cubits, here to five. In a building which was consecrated to the Lord of heaven, and was to effect a connection between heaven and earth, the most emphatic reference to heaven could not be wanting; as far as it was possible for man, the head of the building must point to heaven; humility, no less than pride, has need of a tower whose top is in heaven."—*Hengstenberg.*

The Temple and its Ornaments. (Chap. xli.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**The temple**"—the holy place, the Temple proper, as distinguished from the porch, described in chap. xl. 48, 49, and from the Holy of Holies (1 Kings vi. 17; vii. 50). "**Which was the breadth of the tabernacle.**" *Which was* is not in the original, and should be omitted. As in the measurement of the porch the angel had pointed to Solomon's Temple, so here in the edifice itself he points to the old Tabernacle. Worship is progressive, and expresses itself in harmony with the culture of every age.

Ver. 2. "**The breadth twenty cubits.**" The measurements are internal, the same as in the Temple of Solomon.

Ver. 3. "**Then went he inward.**" Towards the Holy of Holies. It is significant that in this case it is not said *he brought me in*, but *he went in*, because the Holy of Holies was not to be entered even by a priest like Ezekiel, but only by the high priest once a year. So the angel enters, and announces the measurements to Ezekiel whilst he stood in front of the Temple. "**The door six cubits, and the breadth of the door seven cubits.**" The first measurement of the door was from post to post six cubits, and the second measurement, *the breadth of the door*, was the breadth of the actual doors which shut off the Holy of Holies, and which may have been so hung that each of the posts projected half a cubit beyond the hinge of the door, which opened inwards.

Ver. 4. "**So he measured the length thereof.**" The measurements of the Holy of Holies exactly correspond with those in Solomon's Temple (1 Kings vi. 20).

Ver. 5. "**The wall of the house**"—the outer wall of the Temple itself. Its thickness of six cubits corresponds with the colossal proportions of the architecture of the East. "**Every side**

chamber"—the singular used collectively for the plural, to denote the whole series of side chambers.

Ver. 6. **"Three, one over another, and thirty in order."** Literally, "three, thirty times." That is, there were three stories, and each story was divided into thirty chambers. **"They entered into the wall which was of the house for the side chambers."** The wall here described is not the wall of the Temple, which was six cubits (ver. 5), but another wall, which was five cubits (ver. 9), parallel to it, built for the side chambers, and may be said to be of the house—*i.e.*, belonging to it.

Ver. 7. **"There was an enlarging."** This wall had for the ground-story its full thickness of five cubits; then it was diminished one cubit, so as to form a ledge whereon to rest the beams of the floor of the second story, and again was further diminished one cubit for the floor of the third story. Thus there was an enlarging of the second story of the chambers by one cubit, and of the third story by two cubits beyond the breadth of the chambers on the ground-floor. **"A winding about still upwards."** The upper stories were approached by winding stairs, still upward from one story to another.

Ver. 8. **"Great cubits."** "Literally, to the extremity or root of the hand."—*Henderson.* "To the joining or point where the foundation of one chamber ceased and another began."—*Fairbairn.* "To the wing of the house."—*Buxtorf.* "The Hebrew word signifies in the first instance *joining*, and is probably used as an architectural term to denote line of junction between two stories, which would be that of the ceiling of the lower and the floor of the upper story."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 9. **"And that which was left"**—the passage between the side chambers and the Temple wall, implying that no place was to be left which was to be held, as of old, not sacred. The verb I *saw* governs the whole of the eighth and ninth verses.

Vers. 12–17. In these verses we have a summary of the measurements and details of buildings already mentioned. The buildings measured had been the gates of the courts, the Temple, and the building on the separate place. All the overlaying was done by careful measurement, accuracy of measure being, according to Hebrew ideas, an ingredient of perfection.

Ver. 18. **"Made with cherubim and palm trees."** Cherubim a symbol of Divine life; palm-trees of life in general. **"Every cherub had two faces."** Being in sculpture or carving, two faces only would be visible to the spectator. The cherubim have each four faces (chap. i. 10). They indicate that the house is dedicated to the God of the whole terrestrial creation; not to a national god of limited power.

Ver. 19. **"The face of a man was toward the palm trees."** The faces of the cherub look to the palms, to indicate that all creation, animate and inanimate, is a whole—a harmonious work of the creative power of God.

Ver. 21. **"The appearance of the one as the appearance of the other."** The appearance in this vision was the same as in other visions: the appearance of the sanctuary, or Holy of Holies, was similar to that of the Temple. They differed only in magnitude.

Ver. 22. **"The altar of wood—the table that is before the Lord."** The altar of incense (chap. xliv. 16): at it, and not at the table of shew-bread, the priests daily ministered. Table and altar are convertible terms. It stood in front of the vail, and is therefore said to be before the Lord. It is called a table, as being that at which the Lord will take delight in His people, as at a feast. It is not to be confounded with the eight tables

outside at the north gate, which are to be altars for sacrifice of the burnt-offering and sin-offering (chap. xl. 49).

Ver. 25. "**And there were thick planks upon the face of the porch without.**" Ewald translates it *leaf-work*, which agrees very well with the context—"*And there were leaves in wood on the face of the porch without.*"

Ver. 26. "**Palm trees on the one side and on the other side.**" The porch and likewise the wings take the character of the subordinate from this, that only palms are figured on them, and not cherubim also.

HOMILETICS.

The Temple a Symbol of the Christian Church.

(Vers. 1–26.)

I. **As it is the habitation of the Divine presence.** "This is the most holy place" (ver. 4); so called because in the Tabernacle and in Solomon's Temple it was in this place that the Shekinah dwelt—the visible manifestation of the Divine glory. It was also called the *oracle* (1 Kings vi. 16), because from thence Jehovah declared His will. Into this sacred adytum even Ezekiel was not admitted. The angel entered alone. "Then went he inward and measured" (ver. 3), and reported the dimensions to the seer, as he stood awe-struck at the door. The hallowed presence of God is unapproachable but to the holiest. The Christian Church to-day is the spiritual Temple of Jehovah, His home and resting-place; it is filled with His living presence, and that presence, growing more luminous and satisfying, will be the imperishable glory of the Church for evermore.

II. **As it is a combination of strength and beauty** (Ps. xcvi. 6). 1. *It is constructed in harmony with well-known laws* (vers. 1–17). Its walls are strong and massive, its buildings symmetrical, exact in measurement, every detail minutely developed, and the whole edifice constructed according to the laws of proportion. Everything about the building is in perfect harmony with the great end proposed—to reveal the character of the Master Builder and to foster and promote the loftiest worship. The indestructible stability of the structure is assured, as it is built on the incorruptible laws of righteousness and love. The grandest fabrics of the world-empire are gnawed and crunched by the destructive teeth of time. The colossal piles of architecture which filled the soul of Ezekiel with wonder and fear in his Assyrian captivity are now dust and ruins, monuments in their decay of the unfailing truth of God's Word and significant studies of the pious antiquarian; but the Temple of Jehovah remains, and shall from age to age endure. 2. *It is ornamented with artistic suggestiveness* (vers. 18–20, 25). Doors, posts, pillars, and walls were chastely decorated with the figures of cherubim and palm-trees—symbols of life, life in its manifold and highest forms, life traced upwards to its grand creative source. The charm of all art is in its power to delineate life in its endless manifoldness. The painted canvas or chiselled stone is of no value unless it contains those inimitable touches of genius that are full of the suggestiveness of life. The joy of a picture is in what it suggests rather than in what it portrays: the artist may see more in a theme than he has power to represent. The dewdrop that glitters on the end of every leaf after a shower is beautiful even to a child; but to a Herschel, who knows that the lightning itself sleeps within it, and understands and feels all its mysterious connections with earth

and sky and planets, it is suggestive of a far deeper beauty. The eye sees only what it brings with it the power to see. The Temple of God is a living Temple, quivering with the Divine life that pervades every part, and to the spiritually cultured senses it teems with radiant forms of divinest beauty.

III. **As it makes ample provision for the highest needs of the soul** (ver. 22). The altar of incense is here significantly called "the table that is before the Lord." The greatest need of the soul is God; but God can be approached and known only through sacrifice. God Himself provides the altar of sacrifice and the victim too (Heb. ix. 11–14; x. 10–14). The Divine provision is a well-spread banquet, over which God Himself presides. All are invited to freely partake, and the joy of the feast is found in the presence of God at the table. The altar of the heavenly Temple is an altar of incense, but it is the incense of praise; and as the incense, daily rising, diffused itself and perfumed the earthly Temple, so the sweet odour of praise and thanksgiving shall continually ascend before the Lord in the celestial banqueting-house. There is no sacrifice too great for us to offer to Him who has done and suffered so much for us. In an Italian hospital was a soldier lying severely wounded. A lady visitor spoke to him, dressed his wound, smoothed his pillow, made him all right for the day, and before leaving placed a bouquet of flowers beside his head. The grateful soldier, with his pale face and eyes full of tears, looked up and said, "That is too much kindness." She was a lady with a true Italian heart, and looking back to the soldier she quietly replied, "No, not too much for one drop of Italian blood!" And shall we not freely own that the consecration of all our powers of body and soul is not too much to give in return for the shedding of our Emmanuel's blood on our behalf?

LESSONS.—1. *The Temple of God a spiritual fabric.* 2. *The everlasting home of the holy.* 3. *Resplendent with Divine glory.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–26. "Ezekiel never intended that a structure should be reared precisely according to the plan and measurements he furnishes, otherwise he would have been still more minute in his delineations. He has given enough, however, for his great object, which was chiefly to show that in the Divine purpose respecting the future there was to be a full and every way complete reconstruction of the House of God, if not in the outward and material sense, yet in the higher things, which that represented and symbolised, and with the effect of securing a far purer and more elevated condition for the covenant-people. It is this last point which throughout he seeks to render prominent by the nature of his descriptions."—*Fairbairn.*

— "The spiritual lesson to be learned by us from the description here is, that the Church of God, the Temple of the Holy Ghost, as it shall hereafter be manifested on earth, shall be on a scale of grandeur such as has never yet been witnessed, and its worship shall be on a corresponding scale of glory, beauty, and blessedness. Not till then shall the Lord be worshipped visibly in the beauty of holiness by the whole congregation of earth, led on by Israel as the leader of the mighty choir. None of the defects which attend our present liturgical worship shall alloy the perfection of the public services of God which shall then be rendered to Him through Christ. There shall be no divisions. Now the catholicity of the Church is but partially seen, though it is a blessed reality, and its unity is hardly to be recognised at all, split up as it is into a hundred denominations with varying

confessions of faith and different forms of worship; then all shall be one in outward worship, as well as in inward unity of the spirit, and the world will in consequence be attracted to believe the Divine misson of Messiah (John xvii. 21)."—*Fausset.*

— **The Temple a Representation of Christ and His Church.** "1. *It is a representation of the humanity of Christ.* (1.) The Temple was holy; so was Christ (Luke i. 35; Acts xiii. 35; 1 Pet. i. 19, ii. 22; Heb. vii. 26). (2.) The Temple was light and beautiful within; so was Christ (Col. ii. 3; John i. 14; Cant. v. 10; Ps. xlv. 2). (3.) By the Temple they came to know the mind of God; so by Christ God is known (Heb. i. 2; John xv. 15). (4.) The Temple was God's delight: there God dwelt and manifested His glory (chap. xliii. 4, 5). So Christ (John i. 14; Matt. iii. 17; 1 Tim. iii. 15). 2. *It is a representation of the Church of Christ.* (1.) All things in this Temple were measured; so in the Church (Ephes. ii. 21; Rev. xi. 1). (2.) Christ was in this Temple, did all therein and showed all to the prophet; so in the Church (Col. i. 18; Rev. ii. 1, xxi. 3). (3.) In this Temple were chambers, galleries, and stories, one above another; so in the Church there are several ranks and degrees of officers and members (1 Cor. xii. 28; Ephes. iv. 11; 1 Tim. v. 17, iii. 8; 1 John ii. 12, 13)."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 1. "If we diligently attend to the instructions given us in the plainer parts of religion, and profit by them, we shall be led further into an acquaintance with the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. They that are willing to dwell in God's courts shall at length be brought into His Temple. Ezekiel was himself a priest, but by the iniquity and calamity of the times was cut short of his birthright privilege of ministering in the Temple; but God makes up the loss to him by introducing him into this prophetical, evangelical, celestial Temple, and employing him to transmit a description of it to the Church, in which he was dignified above all the rest of his order."—*M. Henry.*

— "We ought to go forward under God's guidance in the ways of the Lord from glory to glory, but not to go backward or stand still except in meditation. The good spirit leads men to the Church, there to listen devoutly to the Word of God; the evil spirit keeps them back from it."—*Starke.*

Ver. 3. "Then went he inward and measured." **The Highest Truths**—1. Often a lonely quest. 2. Seen only by the morally pure. 3. Fill the soul with profound awe. 4. Are to be communicated to others with the utmost exactitude.

Ver. 4. "And he said unto me, This is the most holy place." **The Most Holy Place**—1. Is where God manifests His presence. 2. Is not now confined to any one spot under heaven. 3. What a privilege to meet with one who can direct us to the holiest place! "He said unto me, This is the most holy place."

— "The most holy place is set before us as the goal, and we understand thereby a heavenly state on earth, namely, the Church of the New Testament. Accordingly, in chap. xliii. the entire circuit of the mountain is called most holy, from which it is evident that no one is truly inside this Temple, or even in its courts, who is devoid of the New Testament perfection—Heavenly glory, or eternal bliss, is no doubt the only complete Holy of Holies, yet he who has entered the kingdom of grace has come to a glory which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, to praise and glorify God for ever."—*Lange.*

Ver. 5. "The chambers are not all of the same size, but they are all connected with the sanctuary; the same is the case with the progress and growth of the members of the body of which Christ is the Head—The saints of God are also measured

round and round; no heavier task is laid upon them, no greater temptation befalls them, than what is their Father's will. That the chambers are connected denotes the brotherly relation in the sanctuary (Ps. cxxxiii.; 1 John iii.).—God provides for His servants covert and shelter in the world."—*Lange.*

Ver. 6. "There is a threefold rank or order of the members of the Church; there are lowermost, middlemost, and uppermost. These, as they have their several offices and gifts accordingly, so they must keep to their own stations, do their own business, live in love, and wait till called into a higher room."—*Trapp.*

— "Those in the Church are not all of one rank, whether officers or others; some are of the lower rank, some in the middle, and some uppermost: there are children, young men, and old men; and the higher any get, the more enlargement and greater breadth do they see in the things of God and this Temple; and notwithstanding this difference among them, there is a sweet harmony between them, and they serve one another."—*Greenhill.*

— "That they might have hold, but they had not hold in the wall of the house." **Temple Workers**—1. Find much of their work lies outside the Temple itself. 2. Their work gains its significance and worth by being in connection with the Temple. 3. Their nearness to the Temple no guarantee of the permanence of their labour. 4. Their sphere of work, like these side chambers resting on a separate wall, may be removed without affecting the stability of the Temple. 5. Should be careful in all their work to maintain the inviolability of the Temple.

— "Leaning upon God, upheld by Him, but not mixed up with Him in our affairs.—Of ourselves we cannot stand a single moment."—*Lange.*

Ver. 7. **Still Upward.** "I. *Still upward and still larger is the plan of Divine procedure.* 1. The work of creation was in full harmony with this method. 2. The same in revelation. 3. The same feature in Divine architecture in our Lord's history. 4. Same in the history of the Church. II. *The text illustrates the saint's experience.* 1. It is so in a man's views and thoughts of God. 2. In a saint's apprehension of the blessings of salvation. 3. In his spiritual growth 4. So too with his love. 5. So in aspiration and communion. III. *The text sets forth the saint's destiny.*"—*Homiletic Monthly.*

— "The higher we build up ourselves in our most holy faith, the more should our hearts, those living temples, be enlarged."—*M. Henry.*

— "This might remind God's people of heavenly-mindedness whereby their hearts will be enlarged when once got above the world, as birds sing sweetly when aloft in the air."—*Trapp.*

— "In God's House we must go upward by growth in grace, that the mind may be always the more firmly directed heavenward.—The breadth in the top part.—Christians ought not to contract but to expand as they grow older. Higher grace gives expansion in width and breadth. The narrower points of view with which we ascend gradually disappear.—The broader heart on the height of the Christian life in theory and practice.—Prayer an ascending stair.—But let us not forget that which lies in the middle. In the middle is the means, the way of mediation."—*Lange.*

Ver. 8. The secret of the height depends on the foundation.

Ver. 10. "In the Church much more room is taken up by such as are void of the treasure of God's grace than by better men, rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom of Christ."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 12. The history of dogmas is in many respects the off-place in Ezekiel's Temple.

Ver. 16. "Enlightenment is fre-

above; only thus do we obtain a conception of heavenly things.—Faith is a window, and, as compared with vision, a narrow one.—Through His wounds we see into the heart of Christ as through a window."—*Lange.*

Ver. 17. "The Lord Christ will measure Christians of what height, breadth, and depth they are; their actions, affections, and graces will be measured (Rev. xi. 1)."—*Greenhill.*

Vers. 18–20, 25. **The Noblest Province of Art**—1. To idealise the manifold forms of the highest life. 2. Is consecrated to the holiest ends in the service of God. 3. Finds scope for the most gifted genius in beautifying the Temple of God.

Ver. 18. "Cherubims are generally taken for the portrait of angels and framed to the beauty of young men with wings. Yet is the description of them different in different places, as in Ezekiel's vision chap. i., Isaiah's vision chap. vi., John's vision Rev. iv., and in Solomon's Temple. Palm-trees—a very beautiful, upright tree from a straight, well-grown body, spreading its head with large boughs and branches, which were used on occasions of joy and were emblems of victory (John xii. 13; Rev. vii. 9)."—*Pool.*

— "This was to teach Christians who are the temples of God. 1. To live like angels for holiness. 2. To suffer, as palm-trees, any pressures or pains for His sake with invincible patience. By their piety in their lives and patience at their death the primitive Christians won much upon their persecutors."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 19. "These seem to represent the angels who have more than the wisdom of a man and the courage of a lion; and in both they have an eye to the palms of victory and triumph which are set before them, and which they are sure of in all their conflicts with the powers of darkness."—*M. Henry.*

— "Teachers ought to be men especially to humbled consciences, but lions against enemies."

Ver. 22. "The table before the Lord." **The Divine Generosity**—1. Provides a rich and varied feast for His people. 2. His presence at His own table is the choicest feast. 3. His table is also an altar from which the incense of thanksgiving and praise rises acceptably before Him.

— "The altar is designated as the table or board before the Lord because that which is set on it—the incense, denoting the prayers of the saints (Ps. cxli. 2; Rev. v. 8, viii. 3)—is regarded as spiritual food which the people present to their heavenly King. The altar appears as the table of the Lord also in chap. xliv. 16. The offering appears as the food of God Mal. i. 7. Not without cause is the altar in 1 Kings vii. 48 compared with the table of shew-bread; the bread laid on the latter denoted the spiritual nourishment which the people are to present to their heavenly King, which is good works."—*Hengstenberg.*

— "This altar is at the same time a table, as Christ is to our souls in the Holy Supper."

— "This altar of wood and four-square was a type of Christ, in whom our prayers come before God as incense, and He is the propitiation for our sins (1 John ii. 2; Ex. xxx. 1; Ps. cxli. 2; Rev. v. 8). The largeness of this altar above that of old shows that the saints under the Gospel would make much more improvement of the Lord Jesus in prayer, and make use of His mediation and intercession by faith in their heavenly sublimated supplications, than the saints of old were ordinarily wont to do."—*Trapp.*

— **This Altar a Representation of Christ.** "1. Though the altar was of wood, it was shittim wood—incorruptible; so Christ's human nature was incorruptible; it saw no corruption (Acts xiii. 35). 2. It was larger than that under the Law; so the worship of God in Christ's time should be enlarged (Mal. i. 2). 3. Sweet incense was offered to God on this altar.

Where the people prayed the priest offered incense (Luke i. 9, 10), and when we pray Christ offers up our prayers with the incense and perfume of His merits (Rev. viii. 3, 4; Ephes. v. 2). 4. On this altar was incense, morning and evening; it was a perpetual incense; so Christ, our altar, offers up prayers perpetually for us (Heb. viii. 25). 5. This altar is the table before the Lord. There is something in this expression worthy consideration. (1.) That poor, sinful, weak, unworthy creatures may come to Christ not only as an altar to have their prayers presented to God, but as a table to have refreshing to their souls (John vi. 35, 55; Luke xxii. 30; Rev. vii. 17, ii. 7, 17). (2.) That the Lord Himself is delighted and satisfied in and with Christ, as we are with a table full of dainties, having the choicest meats and drinks (Matt. iii. 17; Isa. xlii. 1). Christ is the altar, the table, the sacrifice, and the meat and drink upon the same."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 23. "Doors let in and shut out; so also does the Church.—Ornament is here combined with solemness. We have not here the joyous worldly beauty of Greece, but neither have we the solemness dark as death as in Egypt. The world opens its doors half to frivolity and half to despondency. —The sanctuary of the heart also must be shut, and not with one door only. Our treasure is incomparable, and ought to be preserved with much watchfulness and strong exhortation."—*Lange.*

— "The Gospel and its ordinances —faith, repentance, and baptism—are the means to salvation; by them we obtain entrance to the communion of saints, the favour of God, and the kingdom of heaven. Christ is the way and the door (John xiv. 6; x. 7), because He has given us the means which are the way and door to the Church and unto life: these doors are to be open for the sheep and to be shut against the goats. We may also understand by these doors the ministers dispensing the Gospel and the ordinances thereof; they are to be holy, vigilant, and zealous as the cherubims, and constantly green, growing, and flourishing as the palm-trees."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 26. "They had palm-trees wrought or engraven on both sides, implying that the materials of Christ's Temple must not be common, but beautifully carved work. The House of Christ and everything in it must be decorated with the engravings of God's Spirit (Ps. xlv. 13; Rev. xxi. 18, 19)."—*Greenhill.*

The Chambers of the Priests. (Chap. xlii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. "**Into the chamber**"—to the chambers; the Hebrew is a collective noun. "**The building. towards the north.**" The direction in which the chambers lay. Place a comma between *building* and *toward.*

Ver. 2. "**Before the length of a hundred cubits was the north door**" —*i.e.*, before the separate place, which was that length. The seer had before spoken of chambers for the officiating priests on the north and south gates of the inner court (chap. xl. 44–46). He now returns to take a more exact view of them.

Ver. 4. "**And before the chambers was a walk of ten cubits breadth inward.**" The word for walk may mean *gangway*, and there may have been in the middle of the chambers a gangway leading inward, with stairs to the upper stories, ten cubits wide, while along the north front of the building there was a kerb of one cubit, as before the guard-chambers (chap. xl. 12), on which kerb the north doors (leading to the basement) opened. *Hengstenberg* calls the walk a *street.*

Ver. 5. "**Now the upper chambers were shorter.**" "To be rendered thus:—And the upper chambers were

shortened, for galleries took off from them (literally, did eat of them), from the lower and from the middlemost chambers of the building. The building rose in terraces, as was usual in Babylonian architecture, and so each of the two upper stories receded from the one below it."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 7. **"The wall that was without."** The wall here must be one from north to south, fencing off from the outer court the passage along the east side of the chambers, and therefore fifty cubits long.

Ver. 8. **"And, lo, before the Temple."** This describes their position in a general way; more precisely, they lay over against partly the separate place and partly the Temple court.

Ver. 9. **"As one goeth into them from the outer court."** There was an entrance at the north of this passage by which the priests entered into the chambers and into the Temple court.

Ver. 10. **"The chambers were in the thickness of the wall."** The verse should be rendered:—Breadthwise was the wall towards the east; in front of the separate place and of the building were the chambers.

Vers. 11, 12, assert that on the south side of the separate place was a block of chambers precisely similar to that on the north.

Ver. 13. **"Where the priests shall eat the most holy things."** In Lev. x. 13 it was prescribed that the priests should eat of the sacrifices in the holy place. This was originally before the altar in the inner court—now separate chambers are assigned, and these become the holy place for this purpose. Only the meat-offerings—the sin and guilt offerings—are mentioned, not the slain or peace offering, because only in the former were the portions falling to the priests most holy, and as such to be consumed by the priests alone, in their official function; whereas in the peace-offerings the priestly portion was consumed by the priests with their whole family, including even the females (Lev. x. 14).

Ver. 14. **"When the priests enter therein."** Another purpose for which these chambers were to be used was for the unrobing of the priests. Only after they have changed their garments which they have used in the service of God are they to enter into intercourse with the people in the outer court.

Ver. 15. **"Measuring the inner house."** Not the Temple, but the Temple and its courts, all that lay within the wall on the outside of the house (chap. xl. 5).

Ver. 16. **"He measured the east side—five hundred reeds."** The vast extent is another feature marking the ideal character of the Temple. It symbolises the great enlargement of the Kingdom of God in the times of the Messiah.

Ver. 20. **"To make a separation."** The sanctuary proper was the Most Holy Place as distinguished from the rest of the Temple; but the term was capable of extension, first to the whole Temple, then to all the ground that was separated to holy as distinguished from profane or common uses. No longer shall the wall of partition be to separate the Jew and the Gentile, for Christ hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us (Ephes. ii. 14), but to separate the sacred from the profane.

HOMILETICS.

WORKERS FOR GOD: THEIR PRIVILEGES AND DISTINCTION.

(Vers. 1–20.)

I. That workers for God have ample provision for all their needs. These chambers were intended for shelter, rest, and refreshment for those who waited on God in worship; every necessary comfort and convenience was provided. The priests were wholly devoted to their sacred calling; they renounced the world and all its most tempting prizes, and gave themselves up body and soul to a life-long consecration to the work of the Temple. The law of worship demanded this complete self-renunciation; and at the same time it secured to the servant of God everything that was essential to his well-being and to help him in his hallowed work. The minister of the Divine Word must be relieved from the fret and care of worldly things, that he may be free to apply himself with a whole-hearted *abandon* to the study and interpretation of spiritual things (1 Tim. iv. 15). Let him take care of the sacred deposit committed to his trust, and God will take care of him. The faithful worker for God need have no anxiety about the future: his anxiety should be undividedly centred on the duties of the present (Luke x. 7; Phil. iv. 19).

II. That workers for God should prepare by devotions in private for the profitable worship of God in public. The chambers, though near the Temple, were separate from it, were strictly private, placed in the midst of stillness and retirement favourable to meditation and prayer. The power of the worker for God in public is acquired by diligent devotion in private. God is known in the greatness and glory of His character and the wisdom and righteousness of His ways; not in the midst of noise and uproar, but in quietness and solitude. The thinker must isolate himself for the time being from all distraction, and quietly and prayerfully wait on God. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. xlvi. 10). Not in the wild commotion and brazen clangour of the battle-field, not in the whizzing hurricane of national strife and uproar, not in the rush and worry of excessive worldly care, are the holy secrets of Divine things divulged to the soul, but in the solitude of retirement, in the hush and stillness of some meditative retreat, where the tocsin of war is never heard and the peal of cannon and crash of arms never penetrate. Not that we are to indulge in a life of useless quietism and inactivity. We must silence our meaningless clamour and pause in our demonstrative activities in order that God may speak and may work His purpose in us: then we receive our commission and are inspired to speak and work for Him. On the quiet pastoral slopes of Midian, Moses, in stillness and awe, witnessed the splendours of the Divine revelation; and then went forth to work, and his life thenceforward was a continuous scene of tireless and prodigious activity. Among the rugged crags of Horeb, Elijah was favoured with a fuller revelation of the Divine character—not in the roaring tempest, the crashing earthquake, or the devouring fire, but in the subduing whisper of the still, small voice—and he rose up to do the will of God with a tenderer and a nobler spirit than he had known before. In the dreary solitudes of Patmos the beloved John beheld, in enraptured stillness, visions of the future history of the Church as they rolled before him in panoramic splendour, and then spent the rest of his life in writing and speaking about them for the benefit of the ages to come. And so the workers for God, in the quietness and secrecy of the closet, receive the blessing of the Lord

that they may bear it forth to the public sanctuary and make their fellow-worshippers all the richer for sharing with them the outpoured endowments of Heaven.

III. **That workers for God should be distinguished by superior sanctity.** 1. *The character of their work demands it.* It is holy work; it has to do with holy things (ver. 13). In connection with the Temple of God a clear and unmistakable distinction is made between things sacred and profane (ver. 20). The law of cleansing observed in the Levitical ritual with such scrupulous minuteness was intended to set forth the absolute necessity of purity in all who took part in the ministrations of the Temple (Isa. lii. 11). Only the holy can comprehend and teach holiness. To understand philosophy we must be philosophic, to appreciate a poet we must be poetical, and to understand purity we must be ourselves pure. 2. *The success of their work will be influenced by it.* It will be seen in its effects both upon themselves and upon others. How often is the best work for God marred by the intrusion into it of human imperfection and sin! It is said that Michael Angelo was once seen absorbingly engaged on an important painting with a lighted lamp fastened across his forehead, so that no shadow from himself might fall upon his work. Even so ought we to lift up the light of a God-given holiness that no shadow of self may darken and disfigure the work we are doing for Him. Man is never so great, so luminous, so grand, as when he is doing holy work with the light and help of the holy God.

LESSONS.—1. *To do the best work for God needs prayerful preparation.* 2. *Work done for God has its own special rewards.* 3. *Personal holiness requisite for the highest kind of success in work for God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–20. "By these buildings connected with the Temple and pertaining to its outward economy we should be reminded that the Lord bestows upon the pious the other necessaries of life also. In Him they find their entire satisfaction; but they use food, drink, intercourse with men and this world, as if they did not use all this. Thus to the pure all things are pure that they do with pure and upright heart. The Word of God makes us strong when it is with us, and blesses also outward things. The Lord has ordained that they who preach the Gospel shall live of the Gospel."—*Œcolampadius.*

Ver. 1. "As this Temple was provided with many chambers, but each had its own purpose, so believing Christians must be sanctified chambers for the glory of God—one for this use, another for that (2 Tim. ii. 21)."—*Starck.*

Ver. 3. "The inner court. This was a figure of the Church invisible, as the outer court was of the visible and external."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 4. The Social Instinct—1. Leads to the place where congenial company is to be found. 2. Delights in the fellowships associated with the House of God. 3. Finds its supreme satisfaction in spiritual communion with the highest.

— "Before the chambers was a walk of ten cubits—a way of one cubit." "There is a broad way and a narrow way; a ten-cubit way and a one-cubit way. The Church at one time has prosperity and freedom; it is in 'a walk of ten cubits;' and the time will come when it shall have greater latitude, liberty, and prosperity. At another time the Church is in straits, afflictions, temptations, and persecutions: it is in 'a way of one cubit.'"—*Greenhill.*

— "A way of one cubit." "A narrow way, but such as led into spacious walks of ten cubits breadth inward. Strait is the gate and narrow the way that leadeth unto life eternal; but they that hit it, hold it, shall walk arm-in-arm with angels (Matt. vii. 14; Zech. iii. 7). Through many tribulations we enter the Kingdom; but there God will set our feet in a large room (Acts xiv. 22; Ps. xxxi. 8). Let it be remembered that this narrow way is but short; it is of but one cubit."—*Trapp.*

— "We are not to spend all our time between the church and the chamber, though a great deal of time may be spent to very good purpose in both; but man is made for society and Christians for the communion of saints, and we must make conscience of the duties of that communion and take the comfort of its privileges and pleasures."—*M. Henry.*

Vers. 5, 6. **The Law of Gradation**—1. Recognised in the various duties and offices in the Church of God. 2. Regulates the distribution of intellectual and spiritual endowments. 3. Limits responsibility to gifts and opportunities.

Ver. 5. "While in the previous chapter the breadth increased with the elevation, it here becomes narrower. The progressive growth in grace is a wider consciousness of Christ, but a constantly narrowing self-consciousness (1 Cor. xv. 9). So is the service in the gospel, when with increasing years our view into eternity expands and similarly contracts in temporal matters; the nearer the day of reckoning is, our responsibility becomes the clearer to us and the more clearly do we see our many mistakes and disloyalties.—There are three stages of life: youth, manhood, and old age, and the last is the narrowest of all."—*Lange.*

Ver. 6. "Had not pillars." "The strength of this Temple was not everywhere alike; some parts had pillars, others had none, or not equal to others. So in the Church of Christ, some parts of it have strong pillars, eminent teachers, whereas other parts are wholly destitute, or have such as are weak."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 7. "God is able to set walls around those who desire to keep themselves pure from the stains of the flesh and to protect them in the hour of trial and temptation. True believers are protected; no one can injure them (John x. 27)."—*Starke.*

— "The wall of God's protection extends as far as the Church, or any part of it."

Vers. 8, 9. **Public and Private Worship**—1. Mutually helpful in the culture of spiritual life. 2. The use of the one does not supersede the use of the other. 3. Public worship a solemn testimony and the sphere where the most memorable blessings are realised. 4. Private worship an essential preparation for successful public worship. 5. Public worship a privilege, to be preferred before and above private worship.

Vers. 13, 14. **The Blessing of Food and Clothing**—1. Abundantly provided for all the creatures of God. 2. Not sufficiently appreciated. 3. Eating and drinking a holy refection to be enjoyed with a thankful heart, which should be suitably expressed before and after partaking. 4. A proof of the universality of the Divine care and goodness.

— "If we have to understand by the priests those brought up from childhood in the faith of Christ and walking in this way, then in these verses is figured their fellowship with one another in particular, their united inquiry into the Word and meditation thereon, and on the mystery of Christ, for growth of knowledge and increase of joy, so that they are prepared and adorned in one and the same faith, always to return to and worship at the altar, which is Christ.—Glory and holiness in their connection; how this

connection is stamped on this Temple and its arrangements and purposes, even to the most minute particulars.—Profane ministers profane the sanctuary.—We ought not to approach the holy table of the Lord with worldly, impenitent hearts."—*Lange.*

— **Ministerial Duties and Privileges.** "1. *The priests approached unto the Lord.* In all administrations of the Gospel ministers approach near to God, and in all their approaches He looks to be sanctified by them. 2. *The priests in God's service had good accommodation.* Here is a Divine ordinance for ministers' maintenance. Whatever good things people possess, they ought to communicate a part to their teachers (Gal. vi. 6; 1 Cor. ix. 13, 14). 3. *Holy things are to be laid in holy places.* Holy hearts are fit places for God, Christ, the Spirit, the Gospel and all the ordinances of it. 4. *Ministers ought to have other frames of spirit in them when they are nearer to God in the duties of His worship than at other times* (ver. 14). Then they are to put on holy garments, be clothed with zeal, fear, and all holy affections. They are to discharge their office with gravity and authority, that their ministry be not despised."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 13. "Ministers must eat as well as others; they are not of the chameleon kind—cannot live on air; and the Lord Christ hath ordained that they which wait at the altar are partakers of the altar (1 Cor. ix. 13, 14)."—*Trapp.*

— "The chambers, though private, are to be near the Temple, which teaches us that our communion with God in our secret chambers is to prepare us for public devotions in the sanctuary, and to enable us to derive all the benefits from them which God has designed. There can be no real worship in public if there be not also worship in private. In the Temple of the Holy Ghost, the Church, there are multitudes dwelling by faith, and yet there is room for more."—*Fausset.*

— "Those that have public work to do for God and the souls of men have need to be much in private to fit themselves for it. Ministers should spend much time in their chambers, in reading, meditation, and prayer, that their profiting may appear; and they ought to be provided with conveniences for this purpose."—*M. Henry.*

Ver. 14. "The clerical coat does not make the clergyman, yet it is a defence and an admonition. The best clerical garment, and one which we may always put on and wear everywhere, is our sanctification in Christ. It is as great a mistake to carry about the clerical coat everywhere, like a monk, as to leave it at home from unclerical frivolity or worldly-mindedness. Paul became all things to all men, but not at the expense of his ministerial office."—*Lange.*

— "Ministers may not leave their station, lay aside their holy calling, entangle themselves with worldly cares and businesses, but make their ministry their business, giving themselves wholly to it. As in doing their office they must use all becoming gravity and authority as the ambassadors of Christ, so at other times they must familiarise themselves with their people, becoming all things to all men, in Paul's sense, that they may win some."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 15. "So wide and spacious will the New Testament Church be, in distinction from the Old Testament Church. A greater than Solomon in all his pomp and glory is here, for Jesus is the Light of all nations. The true Church is the collection of the scattered believers that are in the world.—Observe, only after he had learned exactly the internal magnitude did the prophet learn the external. It is labour in vain to labour in investigating nature until we have first laid a good foundation in godliness. Without this we continue too much devoted to the contemplation of visible things and make them our idols, so that they become a stumbling-block and a snare to ourselves and other inexperienced people. But when thou hast come to

know the inner meaning of spiritual things, and hast tasted the length, height, and depth of the love of God, then thou mayest busy thyself with all visible things. Thou wilt everywhere pause, and contemplating things with the spiritual eye, say, 'O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth!'"—*Lange.*

Vers. 15–20. **The Messianic Church.** "1. *Its extent and latitude.* It is in all quarters of the world. 2. *Its stability and firmness.* The buildings of this Temple are four-square—stable, firm, and lasting. So the Church is strong and permanent (Ephes. ii. 20; Isa. liv. 14; Matt. xvi. 18). 3. *Its lustre and beauty.* Great buildings in the form of a square are beautiful and glorious. So the Church (Cant. vi. 4). 4. *Its safety.* This Temple had a wall round about (ver. 20). The wall of the New Jerusalem is great and high, sufficient to secure all who are within (Rev. xxi 12). 5. *Its sanctity.* This wall was to separate between the sanctuary and the profane place (ver. 20). The Church is a company called out of and separate from the world, who have given up themselves to God and Christ."—*Greenhill.*

Vers. 16–20. **The Grandeur of the Divine Temple.** 1. *It is of vast extent.* He measured the east, north, south, and west sides, each side being 500 reeds (vers. 16–19)—in all a square of $1\frac{1}{7}$ of a mile—exceeding the limits of all ancient Jerusalem. This signifies the great enlargement of the Church of God in future times. 2. *It is immovably secure.* "He measured by the four sides." Its square form betokened the strength and solidity of the whole—an emblem of the kingdom that cannot be moved. 3. *It marks off an unmistakable distinction between the holy and profane.* "To make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place" (ver. 20).

— "Thus every way it exhibits to the eye of faith the true ideal of that pure and glorious Temple which, resting on the foundation of the eternal Son and girt round with all the perfections of Godhead, shall shine forth the best and noblest workmanship of Heaven."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 20. "In Christ all has assumed such a shape that through Him the sanctuary now always continues present in humanity; and the true altar of burnt-offering, Golgotha, is always before the eyes of the Most Holy Father, in order, for the sake of the sacrifice thereon offered, to love, sanctify, and protect us all."—*Diedrich.*

— "Gold is purged in the fire, shines in the water; as, on the other side, clay is scorched in the fire, dissolved in the water."—*Trapp.*

— "The Jews accounted the whole earth profane—common or unclean—compared with Canaan, and Canaan common or less holy than Jerusalem, and every part nearer the Temple the more holy; and so here the outward court was enclosed to distinguish it by its comparative holiness; it was more holy than all without it."—*Pool.*

— "A difference is to be put between common and sacred things, between God's name and other names, between His day and other days, His Book and other books, His institutions and other observances; and a distance to be put between our worldly and religious actions, so as still to go about the worship of God with a solemn pause."—*M. Henry.*

The Consecration of the Temple. (Chap. xliii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 2. "Behold, the glory of God." As the Shechinah-glory was the peculiar distinction of the old Temple, so it was to be in the new in a degree as much more transcendent as the proportions of the new exceeded those of the old. The fact that the Shechinah-glory was not in the second Temple proves that it cannot be that Temple which is

meant in the prophecy. **"The glory came by the way of the east."** The same way by which Jehovah had left the house to destruction because it had been polluted and profaned (chap. xi. 22, 23). He now returns to take possession of His holy habitation, prepared and sanctified for His reception. **"His voice was like a noise of many waters."** The creature has its voice only from the Creator, and therefore must His voice sound above its voice, loud though it be (Ps. xciii. 3, 4; Rev. i. 15). **"The earth shined with His glory."** He who said, "Let there be light," shines forth, when He appears in the clearest light, as He who dwells in inaccessible light (1 Tim. vi. 16; Ps. l. 2; Rev. xviii. 1). By this burst of light extending far beyond Israel is symbolised an enlightenment of the face of the whole earth—the entire region of humanity thus shown to have been in itself and hitherto dark.

Ver. 3. **"When I came to destroy the city"**—*i.e.*, to pronounce God's word for its destruction: so completely did the prophets identify themselves with Him in whose name they spake. **"I fell upon my face."** As in chap. i. 28 the prophet fell down upon his face before the majesty of an angry God, so here before that of God appearing in His grace.

Ver. 5. **"The glory of the Lord filled the house."** So when Jehovah took possession of the Tabernacle (Ex. xl. 34, 35), and of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings viii. 10, 11).

Ver. 7. **"And he said unto me."** "The speaker is designated as a man (ver. 6), and yet he here speaks as God and applies to himself that which can belong only to Jehovah. We have thus without doubt the angel of God before us, the only one in whom the opposition of God and man is mediated and removed."—*Hengstenberg.* **"The place of My throne."** God from the first claimed to be their King politically and religiously, and had resisted their wish to have a human king as implying a rejection of Him as the proper Head of the State. The Messiah-King shall realise the original idea of the theocracy, with its at once Divine and human King reigning in righteousness over a people all righteous (Isa. lii. 1; liv. 13; lx. 21).

Ver. 7. **"For ever."** Observe that the words *for ever* mark the distinction between the new and the former sanctuary.

Ver. 9. **"Put away their whoredom, and the carcasses of their kings."** "As whoredom designates idolatry in general, so what is meant to be said by the corpses of their kings applies to the worship of kings, the forgotten subjection to Jehovah under them, who, if kings, yet are perpetuated only as corpses."—*Lange.* Ahaz brought in an idolatrous altar from Damascus (2 Kings xvi. 11), and Manasseh built altars in the house of the Lord (2 Kings xxi. 4).

Ver 10. **"That they may be ashamed of their iniquities."** When the holy significance of the Gospel is shown to men by the Holy Spirit, they are ashamed of their sins. **"Let them measure the pattern."** Deviation from the exact rules of the Mosaic ordinances was connected with the transgression of the people. So the restoration according to the pattern of the Law was symbolical of their return to obedience.

Ver. 12. **"The whole limit thereof shall be most holy."** This superlative *most holy* which had been used exclusively of the Holy of Holies was now to characterise the entire building.

Ver. 13. **"These are the measures of the altar"**—the altar of burnt offering, the appointed means of access to God. God is about to instruct the seer as to the sacrifices of inauguration whereby places, services, priests, and people were to be dedicated anew to the Lord, as of old under Solomon (1 Kings viii.).

Ver. 18. "**These are the ordinances of the altar.**" "The consecration of the altar corresponds to the consecration of the people to Jehovah, their entire surrender and presentation of themselves to Him. The burnt-offerings usher in the class of offerings which obtains in the state of grace. The justified man lives henceforth not to himself; the service of the Lord which is ministered in the Church is symbolised by this purpose of the altar of burnt-offering; hence there is no act of worship without burnt-offering. The self-surrendering reliance on grace continues to be taken into account, as in the past so for the future, and so the burnt-offering may be called the perpetual offering of the Church of God."—*Lange.*

Ver. 24. "**Shall cast salt upon them.**" "Salt was to be cast on every meat-offering (Lev. ii. 13). Here it is added to the burnt-offering to express still more the idea of purification. In the second Temple no sacrifice was complete without the use of salt, and the Rabbis tell us that there was a great heap of salt close to the altar always ready for use, and that the inclined plane to the altar was kept covered with salt."—*Edersheim's Temple.*

Ver. 26. "**And they shall consecrate themselves**"—literally, *fill their hands;* the conferring of office upon persons in whose hand is laid what they have forthwith to offer and what they have to handle, referring to Lev. viii. 27; Ex. xxix. 24, 25.

Ver. 27. "**And I will accept you.**" After this inauguration the regular service is resumed, and will be acceptable to God. Under the guidance of the Epistle to the Hebrews we cannot fail to recognise in this vision the symbol of the purification of the Church of God by the cleansing blood of Christ, Victim and Priest (Heb. viii., ix., x.).

HOMILETICS.

The Revelation of the Glory of Jehovah.

(Vers. 1–6.)

I. **It was a revelation possessing some remarkable features.** 1. *It was a revelation of the Divine Word.* "His voice was like a noise of many waters" (ver. 2). The dreamy murmur of summer streams soothes the soul into peace; but the roar of the ocean-storm fills it with dread. So God can speak to man in a whisper that comforts, or in a voice that alarms the soul with its trumpet-like tones. The Word of God is His voice; it is powerful, and is intended to be heard afar. In the constant declaration of the Gospel-message that voice is ever pealing in the ears of the nations, and is distinctly heard above the din of loudest opposition. 2. *It was a revelation of visible splendour.* "The earth shined with His glory" (ver. 2). The works of God are a revelation of His glorious character. He is said to "clothe Himself with light as with a garment," and His works are a garment jewelled with stars, embroidered with constellations, and glittering with the riches of all worlds, at once hiding and revealing the Divine form. "His glory is the fulness of the whole earth" (Isa. vi. 3). 3. *It was a revelation of overwhelming majesty.* "And I fell upon my face" (ver. 3), overpowered with the awful grandeur of the vision. The greatness of the Creator rises sublimely above His mightiest works; and a sight of the peerless majesty of Jehovah prostrates the soul with a humbling consciousness of imperfection and sin.

II. **It was a revelation of the glory of Jehovah consecrating His Temple.**

"The glory of the Lord filled the house" (vers. 4, 5). So it filled the ancient Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon (Ex. xl. 34; 1 Kings viii. 10). No such visible glory filled the second Temple. It is to be seen again only in the completed Temple of the future. The manifested presence of God in the believing soul, as in the perfected Church, is its holiest consecration. The glory of the new Temple shall never fade, because the Divine presence will never be withdrawn.

III. **It was a revelation requiring spiritual help to see and understand.** 1. *The help of the Spirit is necessary to see the visions of God.* "So the Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory" (ver. 5). The unaided intellect is incapable of perceiving spiritual realities; they must be Divinely unfolded (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10, 14). The Spirit throws around the soul a heavenly-tempered atmosphere, through which are sifted the glorious visions of God. 2. *The help of the Spirit is necessary to interpret the Word of God.* "And I heard Him speaking to me out of the house" (ver. 6). The Bible is a closed book to the unspiritual. The literary student may find pleasure in its history and poetry; but its inner meanings are a hidden secret until the soul is anointed with the unction of the Spirit. It is in the Temple that the Spirit delights to interpret to the devout worshipper the transcendent revelations of the Divine Word.

LESSONS.—The glory of Jehovah—1. *Shines in all His works.* 2. *Should be prayerfully sought out.* 3. *Is abundantly satisfying.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–6. "The glory of the God of Israel must take possession of the new Sanctuary, as in time past of the Tabernacle and of Solomon's Temple. But it is in a different form. The glory was of old veiled in a cloud resting on the mercy-seat of the Ark between cherubim of carved wood, lifeless and motionless, as though the mercy and the power of God were in some sort restricted to the material building and the people to whom it belonged. Now a personal and living God enters the Sanctuary, condescending to occupy it, not merely as a fixed dwelling-place, but as a centre from whence His power and mercy radiate freely to the utmost ends of the earth. Hence amidst the detailed preparations of the house no mention is made of mercy-seat, so important a part in the former Sanctuary."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

— "What we are taught here is, that Jehovah would renew the manifestation of His favour to the covenant-people, which He did pre-eminently when He dwelt among them in the person of His Incarnate Son."—*Henderson.*

— "We have to notice the essentially moral character of all that was here displayed in vision respecting the future things of God's Kingdom. It was not a pattern which God was going to carry out anyhow and accomplish as by a simple fiat of Omnipotence. It depended upon the condition of the people, and only if they agreed to put away sin from among them and give God the supreme place in their hearts could He manifest Himself toward them in the manner described."—*Fairbairn.*

— **Divine Manifestations**—1. Are always made at the right time and place (ver. 1). 2. Are on a scale of imposing magnificence (ver. 2). 3. Though retaining points of similarity, they are suited to special emergencies (ver. 3). 4. Overawe the soul with their grandeur (ver. 3). 5. Are chiefly seen in connection with the Sanctuary (vers. 4, 5). 6. Have a distinct signi-

fiance for the privileged beholder (ver. 6). 7. Are more highly appreciated when shared with a sympathetic companion (ver. 6).

Ver. 1. "The prophet saw not the glory of God till he had first seen the Mount measured, the Temple restored. Men must usually wait upon God in the use of means ere they see the King in His glory. Men must awake out of the west of wickedness and stand up from dead courses and companies, if Christ, the Day-Star from on high, shall give them light (Eph. v. 14; Luke ii. 28–32)."—*Trapp.*

— "Open to me the pearl gates, Thou who art the ornament of heaven's city, Light from Light, chosen as the light before the world began. The entrance of the glory from the east for lighting the Temple took place when the apostles, on the Day of Pentecost, were endued with power from on high."—*Lange.*

Ver. 2. "The glory of God which shines in the Church shines on the world. When God appeared for David the brightness that was before him dispersed the clouds (Ps. xviii. 12)."

— "All knowledge, all religion, and all arts and sciences have travelled according to the course of the sun, from east to west. From that quarter the Divine glory at first came, and thence the rays of Divine light continue to diffuse themselves over the face of the earth. From thence came the Bible, and through that the new covenant. From thence came the prophets, apostles, and first missionaries that brought the knowledge of God to Europe, to the isles of the sea, and to the west first, and afterwards to these northern regions."—*A. Clarke.*

— "This glory of the Lord seems to have been intended as an emblem of the light of the Gospel, which is the glory of Christ, and which spread from the eastern part of the world into the western; and which has been, and still is, powerful and mighty in operation in saving mankind and enlightening the earth with abundance of knowledge, holiness, and comfort."—*Benson.*

— "Where the Gospel is preached the waters of life make a noise, not only of themselves, but also from the stones which men cast in, and from the rocky banks of worldly hearts which make resistance; but the glory of eternity shines on earth. The loud noise of the glory is the voice of them who praise the Lord with one heart and one voice, here on earth as there in heaven (Rev. xiv. 1). Let us pray God to enlighten the dark earth of our heart with that holy light of His glory."—*Lange.*

— "And the earth shined with His glory." "How can it do otherwise when the Sun of Righteousness cometh in place and irradiateth both organ and object? (2 Cor. iv. 6). Into Solomon's Temple God came in a thick cloud; not so here. Light is now more diffused than ever. Woe be to those who wink, or who seek straws to put out their eyes withal."—*Trapp.*

— "Before the coming of Christ the world was full of heathenish darkness, and Canaan full of types, ceremonies, and shadows; there was little light or lustre there. But when Christ came the oracles of the heathen ceased, the Jewish shadows vanished, and the earth shined with the glory of the Gospel (Matt. iv. 16)."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 3. "God appeared in the same manner when He sent him to speak words of terror, and when He sent him to speak words of comfort, for in both God is and will be glorified."

— "The knowledge of God never causes pride but humility, because it at the same time discovers the corruption of the heart. The more modest a man is and the less he trusts to himself, the more he is endowed with the knowledge of God. The bowed down are revived by the Lord, and led by the Spirit to the place where the majesty of the God of glory shines."—*Lange.*

Ver. 4. "The sins of impenitent Israel caused the glory of the Lord to go out of His house, but now the repentance of Israel is blessed with the return of this glory."—*Pool.*

— "What hinders this glory from filling also thy heart, provided it is not full of other things, and needs first to become empty, that thy hunger and desire may, by the breath of the Spirit, seek and find satisfaction in its fulness?"—*Lange.*

Ver. 5. **Humility**—1. The true attitude of the soul in the revealed presence of God. 2. The result of conscious personal unworthiness. 3. Leads to exaltation.

Ver. 6. "I heard distinctly, intelligibly, so that I am sure it was no delusion. The Lord, who was in that glory, speaks to His people out of His Temple."—*Pool.*

— "The Lord Christ, who is the chief Architect in Temple work, stands by His prophets and servants who are employed therein. When the Temple was first built many were employed therein, but they were not left to their own wisdom and skill. Solomon was principal; he was present, counselled, directed, and assisted; therefore it is said he built the house. So in Ezekiel's Temple, a type of the Gospel Temple, Christ was present; He counselled, directed, assisted, and stood by the prophet."—*Greenhill.*

HOMILETICS.

Holiness the Law of the New Temple.

(Vers. 7–12.)

I. **The Divine government is based in holiness** (ver. 7). The throne of God, the symbol of regal and governmental authority, is firmly established in righteousness. God is holy, His throne is holy, His law is holy, and every single act of His universal administration is pervaded and beautified by His immaculate holiness (Ps. xlvii. 8). The perfected Temple will be the everlasting home and resting-place of Jehovah, and holiness will be the unchanging law of the house (Ps. xciii. 5).

II. **The transgressions of God's people against the law of holiness was the cause of their ruin** (vers. 7, 8). Nothing is more plainly revealed or more frequently and emphatically repeated than this truth, that the sufferings of God's people were brought upon themselves by their disobedience. Sin is so deceptive in its lure and so demoralising in its subtle action, that when its inevitable punishment comes the transgressor is surprised and aggrieved, as if some undeserved injustice had been done to him. It is the nature of sin to blind the soul to its real enormity. Sin cannot reveal itself as sin: it is only as the light of Divine holiness is flashed into it that its terrible havoc is exposed. Therefore, in vindication of His holy name and to produce genuine repentance in the defaulter, God's denunciations of sin are incessant.

III. **The blessings of the law of holiness may be enjoyed by all who truly repent.** 1 *True repentance is a humbling consciousness of sin* (ver. 10). The seer is instructed to reveal to Israel the glorious character of the new Temple in order to make them ashamed of their iniquities. A revelation of the goodness of God in what He provides for us, of the purity of God in what He demands, prostrates the soul in humiliation and sorrow. A sense of shame is the first hopeful sign towards moral reform. A teacher of the deaf and dumb once asked his pupils to write down what they thought was the most delightful emotion. One wrote *joy*, another *hope*, another *gratitude*, another *love*; but one peaceful-looking girl, with eyes shining with tears, wrote, "*Repentance* is the most

delightful emotion;" and when asked why, answered, "Because it is so delightful to be humbled before God!" 2. *True repentance is the putting away of sin* (ver. 9). Sorrow for sin is puerile, weak, illusive, unless accompanied by a sturdy resolution to amend. Sin must not only be grieved over, but forsaken. Maudlin tears reform nothing. 3. *True repentance is evidenced by obedience.* "That they may keep all the ordinances and do them" (ver. 11). The proof of genuine sorrow is seen in an honest endeavour to observe the laws over whose violation we grieve. It is not enough to know the right; we must do it. God reveals His laws, not that they may be admired and praised, still less transgressed, but that they may be observed and practised. Let sorrow for the past urge to prompt and faithful service.

IV. **The law of holiness is all-comprehensive in its operation** (ver. 12). In the old Temple only one spot was accounted the Holy of Holies; but in the new Temple every part is most holy: the law applies with equal force to each portion of the consecrated house. The law of God's Temple is the law of the universe, and furnishes the standard by which all thoughts, words, and deeds will be unerringly estimated.

LESSONS.—1. *Holiness is the law of the highest life.* 2. *Holiness is the glory of a perfect character.* 2. *Holiness is the organ of the grandest spiritual visions.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 7–9. **The Divine Ruler**—1. Is enthroned in the midst of His people (ver. 7). 2. Cannot tolerate a rival (ver. 8). 3. Ensures the everlasting happiness of the obedient (ver. 9).

Ver. 8. **Spurious Religion.** 1. *Its institutions a poor imitation of the genuine.* "Setting their threshold by My thresholds, and their post by My posts." 2. *Gains no authority by its proximity to the genuine.* "The wall between Me and them." 3. *Is an aggravated profanation of the genuine.* "They have even defiled My holy name by their abominations that they have committed." 4. *Incurs the Divine displeasure and punishment.* "Wherefore I have consumed them in Mine anger."

— "The palace of Solomon abutted upon the southern side of the embankment of the Temple platform. Thus the threshold of the King's dwelling was set by the threshold of Jehovah, and their posts by His posts, and there was but a wall between Jehovah and them. It was not that the act of building a palace close to the Temple was in itself profane, but when the kings gave themselves up to idolatry this vicinity was to the Temple a pollution and defilement."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 9. "God now first returns to the apostates; but His grace is designed to work repentance, and then He will never more depart from them."—*Diedrich.*

Vers. 10–12. **The Vision of Divine Things**—1. Humbles the soul under a sense of ingratitude and sin (ver. 10). 2. Stimulates to a more earnest and practical obedience (ver. 11). 3. Reveals the exalted sanctity of the Divine law (ver. 12).

Vers. 10, 11. **The New Temple.** "The Israelites of the Captivity might see the pattern when they had repented of their iniquities; till then it was impossible. The idea of a spiritual society could not unfold itself to them while they were living in a heartless, divided, self-righteous state. They must be humbled before they could feel the possibility of such a society; still more before they could confess it to be real. The hindrance to the

discernment of it was not an intellectual one; it was not that they wanted the intuition and the foresight of the prophet; it was wholly moral. It was their baseness and selfishness which made their eyes dim that they could not see, and their ears heavy that they could not hear. It was so then; it was so in every generation afterwards. 'Repent,' said John the Baptist, 'for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' The pattern of the house is about to be presented to you. The spiritual society, of which your Temple is the imperfect outward embodiment, is going to be manifested. The Head of it is among you, but you cannot see it, you cannot see Him. Repent; turn round to God, that He may remove the film from your eyes and enable you to receive the revelation which He is making to you. The same language goes through the Gospels. All the blindness which is ascribed to the Jewish nation is mainly this, that they would not accept it as the manifestation of a kingdom for human beings, of a society grounded upon the name of the Son of God and the Son of Man; that they would have only a Jewish society. And that Jewish society proved itself not to be Jewish, but a miserable collection of sects, hating each other and contrary to all men, not claiming to be children of God, and therefore not able to assert their title as children of Abraham; essentially inhuman, and therefore necessarily given up to the worship of a false god—of Mammon instead of Jehovah. Ezekiel was to show his countrymen the form of the house when a confession of their iniquities should enable them to discern the pattern after which it was to be built. The law must hold good for all time to come. There may be such a house yet built in Jerusalem. But it must be built by a people who are capable of giving the outward expression to an inward truth that is possessing them; who have humbled themselves in dust and ashes before God for their selfishness, their exclusiveness, their worship of gold; who have confessed the Cross to be the highest manifestation of the wisdom and power of God; who have rejoiced in that manifestation because it is universal, and who have perceived that the Divine Unity is not a narrow, selfish individuality, but the unity of a Father with a Son in one Spirit."—*F. D. Maurice.*

Ver. 10. "Solomon's Temple left the people in their disobedience and worship of idols; but this house belongs to a higher order. He who lays it to heart will cease sinning and duly examine the Temple and its measurements. The shame of the poor sinner finds in the Temple—which is Christ—exactly the right measure."—*Lange.*

— "Nothing so effectually makes men ashamed of their sins as the revelation to them by the Holy Ghost of Christ crucified and Christ glorified in the hearing of the Word. The height, depth, length, and breadth of the love of Christ to His spiritual Temple, the elect Church, causes the believer to loathe his past course of life and henceforth desire to live wholly to Christ. Thus believers are prepared for further discoveries of the blessed laws of God's spiritual house."—*Fausset.*

— "1. When God reveals mercy and shows kindness to a sinful people, they ought to be ashamed and repent of all their former iniquities. (1.) As acts of filthiness. (2.) As acts of folly. (3.) As acts of unkindness and ingratitude. (4.) As fearing a just reproof. (5.) As fearing God's cause and name will suffer by them. 2. Those who have humbled themselves for their former sins are fit to be spiritual mathematicians."—*Greenhill.*

— "And let them measure the pattern." "That by a holy geometry they may in the spirit of their minds take all the dimensions of it and be transformed into the likeness of the heavenly pattern. These are those holy and heavenly mathematics which none can learn but those that are taught of God, and without which none can be Christ's disciple; like as none might be scholar to Plato that

had not the grounds of geometry."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 11. "They who repent of their sins are capable of knowing the Temple and its arrangements, while those who wantonly pursue fleshly desires receive not the spirit of wisdom, and are incapable of knowing the law of the Lord (2 Tim. ii. 19; 1 John iii. 3)."—*Lange.*

— **The Ordinances of the Temple.** "1. That to repentant men, ashamed of all their evil doings, the ways of God's house are to be made known by the prophets and ministers. 2. Temple and Church work must not be according to men's fancies, but according to the mind of God and that pattern He gives forth. 3. That the Temple and Church of Christ has distinct and peculiar laws of its own. 4. The Church in due time shall be such a Temple as is represented by this vision. 5. The end of making known the laws and ways of God's house is, that they may be observed and practised."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 12. **The Law of God's Church.** "1. The Church of God has a good foundation. 'Upon the mountain.' 2. The Church of God is eminent and conspicuous. 'Upon the top of the mountain.' 3. The whole Church of God is to be made up of holy materials. 'The whole limit thereof round about.' 4. The law of this house, which is holiness, is specially to be observed. 'Behold, this is the law of the house.'"—*Greenhill.*

— "The law of the house—which was pre-eminently entitled to be called *the* law—consisted in the whole region of the Temple-Mount being most holy. Not, as hitherto, was this characteristic to be confined to a single apartment of the Temple; it was to embrace the entire circumference occupied by the symbolical institutions of the kingdom, the chambers allotted to the priests, and even the courts trodden by the people, as well as the immediate dwelling-place of Jehovah. So that the pattern delineated is that of a true theocracy, having God Himself for King, with the community in all its members for true denizens of the kingdom and acceptable ministers of righteousness before the Lord."—*Fairbairn.*

— Let none expect the protection and blessings of it that will not submit to this law.

HOMILETICS.

The Altar an Emblem of True Worship.

(Vers. 13–27.)

I. That true worship must be offered at the Divinely consecrated shrine (vers. 13–26). The importance attached to the altar here described is seen in the minute particulars given concerning its measurements and structure, and the elaborate ceremonial observed in its dedication to the service of Jehovah. It was not like one of the portable altars that idolatrous worshippers were accustomed to carry about with them in their journeys and wars, but was a fixed shrine having a permanent place in the Temple, and was the recognised medium of access to God. Here the worship of the Temple must be offered. The Jewish system being a theocracy, a visible representation of the reign of God, Jehovah was worshipped by them as both God and King. This twofold character was observable in all the arrangements of the ancient cultus. The Temple was at once the shrine of God and the palace and throne of the King. Christ is the Altar of the new dispensation, the Divine shrine consecrated by suffering and death, through whom alone worship can be offered to the God of heaven. From any other altar worship rises no higher than the smoke that ascends from it, and its effect disappears as quickly.

II. **That true worship is a sacrifice** (ver. 27). As soon as the altar was duly consecrated sacrifices were perpetually offered upon it. "The burnt-offering" was the perfect sacrifice, because the victim was wholly consumed by fire and sent up to God, as it were, on the wings of fire. It was a memorial of God's covenant, and signified that the offerer belonged wholly to God, that he dedicated himself, soul and body, to Him, and placed his life at His disposal. Every such sacrifice was a type of the perfect offering made by Christ on behalf of the human race. "The peace-offering" was not an atoning sacrifice to make peace with God, but a joyful celebration of peace made through the covenant. In this part of the ritual, more than in any other, we see Jehovah present in His house inviting the worshipper to feast with Him. Peace-offerings were presented either as a thanksgiving, or in fulfilment of a vow, or as a free-will offering of love and joy. True worship is a sacrifice, a free offering up of the worshipper and all he has to God, and is expressed in devout adoration and thanksgiving and in joyful praise. It is the spontaneous outburst of a loving heart, yearning to render homage to the great object of its love, and finding its deepest satisfaction in the exercise.

III. **That true worship is acceptable to God** (ver. 27). It is acceptable when and as it is offered in the manner and spirit God has Himself prescribed. It must be offered through Christ, the true Priest and Altar, and with the aid of the Divine Spirit. Many of the heathen priests acknowledged the moral element in worship, as when one counselled, "Sacrifice to the gods, not so much clothed with purple garments as with a pure heart." And another said, "God regards not the multitude of the sacrifices, but the disposition of the sacrificer." God must cease to be Spirit before any service but that which is spiritual can be accepted by Him. David expresses the blessedness and help received in worship by men of all ages, in that earnest invitation, "O come, let us worship and bow down" (Ps. xcv. 6, 7). To refuse to worship God is as great a folly as to deny His existence. He who denies the being of God is an atheist to His essence; he who denies His worship is an atheist to His honour. The instinct of worship is as universal as the notion of a God, or else idolatry would never have gained so firm a footing in the world. Our minds are a beam from God, and, as the beams of the sun when they touch the earth, should reflect back upon God. We unsoul our souls when we neglect the worship of God, and are like flies that are found oftener on dunghills than among flowers.

LESSONS.—1. *Worship is absolutely necessary for the culture of the soul.* 2. *Worship is acceptable only as it is offered according to Divinely sanctioned methods.* 3. *Idolatry is a false and debasing worship.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 13–27. "Now that the Lord has taken possession of the house, the prophet goes on to show how the work of fellowship and communion with Him is to proceed on the part of the people. It must begin anew, and of course be conducted after the old manner, for no other could here come into contemplation. In ancient times the grand medium of Divine intercourse was the altar, at which all gifts and sacrifices were to be presented for the Divine favour and blessing." —*Fairbairn.*

— **The Divinely Authorised Altar** —1. Is minutely described that there might be no question as to its identity (vers. 13–17). 2. Is solemnly consecrated that there may be no doubt as to the necessity for its use (vers.

18–26). 3. Provides a way of acceptance to every penitent seeker (ver. 27).

Ver. 13. The Jews after their return from captivity had an altar long before they had a Temple (Ezra iii. 3), but the altar here spoken of is an altar in the Temple, the mystical Temple, emblematic of the Gospel Church; and this altar is mystical too, for Christ is our Altar.

— "No one could go into the Temple without passing by the altar, and so no one can go into heaven without the sacrifice of the death of Christ."—*Starck.*

Vers. 15–17. "The number twelve was symbolical of the twelve tribes, four of the earth, sixteen is the square of four, and fourteen the double of seven—the number of the covenant as being composed of three, the number of God, and of four, the number of the world. Thus we have in the altar a special instance of Hebrew symbolism."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 15. "'So the altar'—Heb., *the mount of God.* 'And from the altar'—Heb., *from the lion of God.* Perhaps the first was a name given to the altar when elevated to the honour of God, and on which the victims were offered to Him; and the second, the lion of God, may mean the hearth, which might have been thus called because it devoured and consumed the burnt-offerings as a lion does his prey."—*A. Clarke.*

Ver. 16. "Christ, the Christian Altar, is complete, firm, and fixed."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 17. "Toward the east." "These stairs were placed eastward that he who went up should have his face to the west, his back to the east: his face toward God, not toward the rising sun, as they who made the sun their idol."—*Pool.*

Ver. 18. "Thus God comes first and gives grace; His grace makes ashamed, chastises, sanctifies, reconciles, and produces intimate eternal fellowship. This is always God's way with men, provided only we recognise it aright in these days of ours when now it is set in the most glorious light; Christ and the apostles have given additional clearness to Ezekiel."—*Diedrich.*

Vers. 18–27. "Although the chief scope of this vision be to set out the glory and greatness of the Church under the Gospel and among the Gentiles, yet, because the Jews at this time being in Babylon were to return to Jerusalem, the Lord alludes to ordinances, rites, and ceremonies which were well known among the Jews, holding out under them the spiritual worship of the Gospel."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 24. **The Best Efforts of Man**—1. Are tainted with impurity. 2. Need to be cleansed and made wholesome. 3. Augmented in efficacy when salted with study, prayer, tears, and suffering.

— Grace is the salt with which all our religious performances must be seasoned (Col. iv. 6).

— "True Christians are sacrifices well seasoned: incorrupt doctrines will make incorrupt souls and bodies; the salt makes both immortal: men soundly salted with Gospel truths shall never perish."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 27. As to the future sacrificial service of Israel, we can well afford to wait till God by the event shall clear up every difficulty; and throughout eternity we shall adoringly wonder at the beautiful variety and, at the same time, perfect unity of the several parts of the mighty scheme of redemption through the incarnate Son of God."—*Fausset.*

— "Those who were in Christ before others ought in this to serve as priests to the younger believers."—*Lange.*

THE RELATION OF PRINCE AND PRIESTS TO THE TEMPLE. (Chap. xliv.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"The gate of the outward sanctuary"** —the court of the priests as distinguished from the Temple itself. **"This gate shall be shut"**—shut to the people, but opened on certain days for the prince (chap. xlvi. 1), he holding the place of God in political concerns, as the priests do in spiritual. Only a prince of the House of David might sit down in the priests' court. As a mark of respect to an Eastern monarch, the gate by which he enters is thenceforth shut to all other persons.

Ver. 3. **"It is for the prince."** The Rabbis understood this to be the Messiah; but this cannot be, as He would not be likely to offer a burnt-offering as the prince was required to do (chap. xlvi. 4). The prince must mean the civil ruler under Messiah: he represents Messiah, who entered heaven, the true Sanctuary, by a way that none other could. **"Because the Lord hath entered in by it."** "How glorious must the entering Lord be when the prince cannot be more highly honoured than by a place in the gate by which He entered!"—*Hengstenberg.* **"To eat bread before the Lord"**—a custom connected with sacrifices (Gen. xxxi. 54; Ex. xviii. 12, xxiv. 11; 1 Cor. x. 18). According to the old law, these feasts belonged only to the priests; none of the rest of the congregation, not even the king, might partake of them: the new system gives to the prince a privilege which he did not before possess, he standing, as the representative of Messiah, in a higher position than the kings of old.

Ver. 6. **"The rebellious house of Israel."** The sins of the priesthood acted and reacted on one another: like priest, like people; and like people, like priest (Jer. v. 31; Hos. iv. 9). God expostulates with His people in the seat of their former iniquity (ver. 4; chap. viii. 3).

Ver. 7. **"Strangers."** Here the people are taught that unfaithful priests uncircumcised in heart (Acts vii. 51), though of the true lineage, are regarded as strangers.

Ver. 8. **"Ye have set keepers"**—according to your own pleasure, not My ordinances (Num. xvi. 40; 1 Kings xii. 31).

Ver. 10. **"The Levites that are gone away far from Me."** The Levites as a body had remained true to the Temple-service at Jerusalem (2 Chron. xi. 13). But individuals among them deserted to Israel. These apostate Levites shall bear their iniquities; they shall not be restored to their former rank and privileges.

Ver. 11. **"Yet they shall be ministers"**—servants performing menial offices for the ministering priests—acting as porters, helping in the slaughter of the victims, but not as sacrificing priests. They shall not be excluded from all service in the Sanctuary, but degraded from the functions of priests to those of simple Levites. One may be a believer, and that, too, in a distinguished place, and yet lose some special honour—be acknowledged as pious, yet be excluded from some dignity. **"Having charge at the gates."** Though standing as mere doorkeepers, it is in the house of God which hath foundations; whereas they who dwell with the wicked dwell in but shifting tents (Ps. lxxxiv. 10).

Ver. 15. **"The priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok."** The priests of the line of Ithamar were to be discharged from ministrations in the Temple because of their corruptions. Zadok, according to his name, which means *righteous*, and his line were to succeed, as they did not take part in the general apostasy to the same degree (1 Kings ii. 35; 1 Chron. xxiv. 3). It

indicated a race of faithful and devoted servants—a priesthood serving God in newness of spirit, not in the oldness of the letter, as the people whom they represented should also have become true Israelites, themselves a royal priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices to the Lord.

Ver. 17. "**Clothed with linen garments.**" Four vestments were worn by the ordinary priest — the linen breeches, the coat, the girdle, and the bonnet. The material of which they were made was linen, or, more accurately, *byssus*, the white shining cotton stuff of Egypt. These two qualities of the *byssus* are specially marked as characteristic, being symbolical of purity.

Ver. 20. "**Neither shall they shave their heads**"—as mourners used to do, and as the Levitical priests were forbidden to do (Lev. xxi. 1–5). The worshippers of the Egyptian idols Serapis and Isis shaved their heads—another reason why the priests of Jehovah are not to do so. "**Nor suffer their locks to grow long**"—as the luxurious, the barbarians, and soldier in warfare did.

Ver. 21. "**Neither shall any priest drink wine**"—lest the holy enthusiasm of their devotion should be mistaken for inebriation, as in Peter's case (Acts ii. 13, 15, 18).

Ver. 23. "**And they shall teach**"—to spread out the hand, for example, to point to something, to teach. The priestly service is to comprehend worship and doctrine, representation of the people before God, and representation of God before the people—everything with an eye to sanctification.

Ver. 24. "**They shall stand in judgment.**" There was in the second Temple a council of priests whose special duty it was to regulate everything connected with the Sanctuary.

Ver. 28. "**It shall be unto them for an inheritance.**" The remains of the sacrifices were a chief source of the priests' support. "**I am their inheritance—possession**"—something which one grasps and retains. Jehovah is the all-sufficing possession of His servants (Num. xviii. 20; Deut. xviii. 1).

Ver. 30. "**And every oblation**"—offering, or heave-offering, whatever is according to precept, or of free will, lifted up for Jehovah as a consecrated gift to the Sanctuary. "**That he may cause the blessing to rest in thine house.**" The heaving and waving of the offering involved the thought that in consequence of such gifts to the priest the blessing of God is brought down on the individual house.

Ver. 31. "**That priest shall not eat of anything that is dead of itself, or torn.**" This was defiling for any man (Lev. xvii. 15); how much more so for the priests of Jehovah! (Lev. xxii. 8). Thus was the idea of holiness strictly enforced.

HOMILETICS.

The Dignity of the Civil Ruler.

(Vers. 1–3.)

I. Arises from the exalted character of His regal functions. The king is the human representative of Divine justice, both in its administration and maintenance; he is God's vicegerent and deputy. The word that describes his office indicates his power—King, *Könning*, Able-man. He is the summary of all that is great and noble in man. "Priest, teacher, whatsoever of earthly or of spiritual dignity we can fancy to reside in a man embodies itself here, to

command over us, to furnish us with constant practical teaching, to tell us for the day and hour what we are to do." He is a leader and guide of men, and must be lifted far beyond the suspicion of selfishness and partiality. He must rule in equity and righteousness, with an ear deaf to the flattery of the rich, and a hand ever ready to help the oppressed and poor. He must defend virtue among the weakest, and punish iniquity among the strongest. Every brave and honest endeavour to act the king adds new lustre to the dignity of the office. The king, like every other true man, is not above acting upon the advice—

> "This above all: To thine own self be true,
> And it must follow, as the light the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man."

II. **Distinguished by privileged access to the Divine Temple (vers. 1–3).** The east gate, through which the glory of the Lord entered the Temple, was to be shut, to be a perpetual reminder of that signal honour paid to the building, and to induce a profound reverence for the Divine majesty. But the prince was permitted to enter the porch of that gate to indicate that his office brought him into nearer contact with God, and to give weight and authority to all his royal proceedings. It is necessary to surround and support the throne with the sanctions of Divine privilege in order to keep up the king to the loftiest standard of right and to give force to every act of justice in the kingly administration.

III. **Maintained by spiritual communion and fellowship with the Divine Ruler.** "He shall eat before the Lord" (ver. 3). The prince is permitted to enter the porch of the east gate that he may worship God. It is thus he is constantly reminded of his high duty and receives moral strength to act in harmony with the Divine standard. The higher we rise in the social scale the greater are our responsibilities, and the more need is there to seek Divine help to be faithful and true. The loftiest function of the king is to be the patron and protector of religion. He must seek power for his work at the same source to which the humblest believer is invited—in communion with God. The soul finds its greatest blessings in intense fellowship with the highest. Augustine once beautifully said, "Thou mayest seek after honours and not obtain them; thou mayest labour after riches and yet remain poor; thou mayest doat on pleasures and have many sorrows. But our God, of His supreme goodness, says, 'Whoever sought Me and found Me not? Whoever desired Me and obtained Me not? Whoever loved Me and missed Me? I am with him that seeks Me. He hath Me already that wishes for Me; and he that loveth Me is sure of My love.'" Fellowship with God is the secret of power to govern righteously and to labour with pleasure and success.

LESSONS.—1. *The kingly office has grave responsibilities.* 2. *The highest honour of the king is to be the faithful servant of God.* 3. *The king must seek Divine grace to fulfil the duties of his office.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 1–3. "The spiritual truth to be learned here is, that our Messiah entered heaven, the true Sanctuary, by a way that none other could, on the ground of His own perfect holiness (Rom. i. 4): all we must enter as sinners saved by grace. Through Him alone believers eat before the Lord in the communion of the Holy Supper, and shall hereafter experi-

mentally realise that scripture, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God' (Luke xiv. 15)."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 1. "And it was shut." The Glories of Heaven—1. Are Divinely secured. 2. Are open to all penitent seekers. 3. Are inaccessible to the unbelieving.

— "Our heart too should be shut to the world and the devil when once the holy God has entered into it and His glory has swallowed up sin and misery in us. Alas! if the door of heaven should be shut!"—*Lange.*

Ver. 3. "What could this import but that the prince should feel he now occupied a place of peculiar nearness to God? As God's vicegerent and deputy among the people, it became him to be the most distinguished representative in public life of God's holiness; to tread the higher walks of spiritual communion with heaven, and stand pre-eminent in his zeal for the interests of truth and righteousness. Far now from usurping the authority that belonged to God and abusing it to selfish ends, all authority and power in Israel should be exercised—if this Divine ideal were reduced to practice—in a solemn feeling of subordination to God's majesty and with an unfeigned desire for His glory."—*Fairbairn.*

— The Kingly Office — 1. Enjoys distinguished privileges. 2. Involves much anxious thought and onerous toil. 3. Needs the help of an earnest, practical piety.

— "The Christian ruler ought to be the Christian pattern of his people. He is not to preach, just as it is not his office to offer sacrifice; but he is to nourish and protect the Church and avow its faith. He ought to have a good conscience and joy before the Lord because of his princely office, which does not merely consist in this, that we live in peace and quiet under his sceptre, but also that the people may hear the Word of God and without fear offer to Him the sacrifices of their worship"—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS.

A Holy Priesthood.

(Vers. 4–31.)

I. **Urged to fidelity by admonitions of former neglect.** 1. *Reminded of the lofty standard of Temple-service* (vers. 4, 5). Having seen the exalted position of the prince, the prophet is shown the character of the priesthood which is to minister in the glorious Temple. A vision of the Divine glory filling the house is again flashed upon him, and he is earnestly called upon to observe with special care the ordinances and laws of the priesthood and every minute detail of the Temple-ritual. The supreme holiness of Jehovah and the manifested splendour of His majesty demand a worship of the highest and purest order. He can be ministered unto acceptably only by a holy priesthood. The object of worship reacts upon the worshipper; and our conceptions of God must necessarily affect and mould the character of the worship we offer to Him. Our souls should be continually straining after enlarged views of God, that our worship may be intelligent, reverent, and holy. 2. *The apostasy of priests and people is a desecration of the Temple* (vers. 6–10). Priests and people had been unfaithful to covenant engagements and rebelled against the Divine laws. The corruption of the one class reacted upon the other, and their conjoint abominations polluted the holy Sanctuary. The old adage, "Like priest, like people," is not less true than "Like people, like priest." The priesthood is bound by its calling always to be ahead of the people in teaching and morality. 3. *Unfaith-*

ful priests are deposed from the highest service (vers. 11–14). The Levites who were carried away with the idolatrous tendency of the times are degraded in their status. Yet their punishment is mixed with mercy. They were not utterly excluded from the Temple. While they were not allowed to take part in the more privileged acts of worship, they were permitted to perform inferior and menial duties. The goodness of God ever provides a way of recovery for the erring; and the humblest place in His Temple is a post of honour that should be appreciated the more it is undeserved.

II. **Composed of those who have been faithful in time of trial** (vers. 15, 16). Amid the general defection the descendants of Zadok maintained their integrity, and they are promoted to honour; they become a type of the holy priesthood which is to occupy the highest place in the newly constituted Temple of the future. Trial is the test of character, and every resistance to evil is a strengthening of the moral fibre. The men who are to-day wielding the mightiest influence for good in Church and State are those who, in the midst of obscurity and misrepresentation, have remained true to their conscience and their God. As gold shines the brighter when submitted to the fiercest fire, so religious principle glows with a diviner lustre the more it is tried. Trial is the pathway to honour and fame.

III. **Must observe the Divinely sanctioned laws of purity** (vers. 17–27). The minute directions here given concerning the vestments and habits of the priests have a distinctly moral significance. They must wear linen garments, emblems of cleanliness and purity; they must not shave their heads—as mourners did—nor let their hair grow uncut—as persons unfit for active service—nor drink wine when engaged in Temple-service—lest they should be unfit for high spiritual emotions—nor do anything which under the outward restrictions of a symbolic ritual betokened a want of inward purity. The holiness that pervades the house of God must pervade the hearts and lives of those who are called to minister in its hallowed services. The spirit in which the holiest acts are done is a sample and pattern of the spirit in which every duty should be done (Luke xxii. 19; comp. Col. iii. 17).

IV. **Assured of adequate maintenance** (vers. 28–31). God takes care to make ample provision for those who work for Him. What they may lack in worldly affluence He makes up to them in the satisfying comfort of His presence and in the riches of His grace. Poverty has its temptations and anxieties, but it is powerless to harm the soul that has its inheritance in God. Let body and soul be wholly devoted to the service of God, and He will not fail to furnish all necessary supplies (Ps. xxxvii. 3).

LESSONS.—1. *Priestly sins are aggravated because of the privileges and opportunities of the priestly office.* 2. *Priestly duties demand the loftiest purity.* 3. *The priest is a power for good only as he is faithful to the Divine law.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 4–31. "All who are engaged in the ministry should be blameless, sound in the faith, full of good works, exemplary in their lives, walking humbly before God and circumspectly in the sight of men. They should be especially careful in forming connections, and prudent in the management of their families, observing and teaching others to keep the statutes of the Lord. They should delight in every part of their sacred service, yet

do all in humble reliance on Christ. Their wants should be supplied, so that they may not be obliged to involve themselves in worldly cares and employments for a maintenance."—*Henry and Scott.*

Vers. 4, 5. **Divine Revelations—1.** *Should be seen from different points of view.* "Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house" (ver. 4). 2. *Overpower the earnest student with their splendour.* "I looked, and behold the glory filled the house, and I fell upon my face" (ver. 4). 3. *Boldly challenge the most minute and careful investigation.* "Mark well all the ordinances, the entering in and every going forth of the sanctuary" (ver. 5).

Ver. 4. "God reveals His glory to His servants, especially when He calls on them to make known His will to His people (Acts xviii. 9; xxiii. 11)."

Ver. 5. "Divine things are not to be drowsily listened to or drowsily engaged in. In everything there must be heart—in seeing, in hearing, in doing.—The goings in and out of the Sanctuary a solemn consideration for every one, but especially for those who keep the charge of the Sanctuary, whatever their rank in the service."—*Lange.*

Vers. 6–14. **God's Treatment of Rebels.** 1. *Their sins are accurately recorded*—rebellion (ver. 6), abominations (vers. 6, 7), polluting the Sanctuary (ver. 7), idolatry (ver. 12), breaking of covenant (ver. 7), neglect of duty (ver. 8). 2. *They are faithfully reproved* (vers. 6–13). 3. *They are made conscious of their evil doings.* "They shall bear their iniquity" (vers. 10, 12). 4. *They suffer official degradation* (vers. 11, 14).

Ver. 7. "The voice of the people, the choice of the people, is not God's voice, God's choice, but frequently God's judgment to the full.—Self-chosen Divine service is an abomination to the Lord."—*Lange.*

Vers. 8, 14. "Ye have not kept the charge. But I will make them keepers of the charge." **The Divine Mercy—** 1. Takes note of every act of unfaithfulness. 2. Does not fail to administer faithful reproof. 3. Does not utterly abandon the transgressor. 4. Is ever ready to restore the penitent.

Ver. 8. "What general can employ a soldier who is everything else, but no soldier?"

Ver. 9. "It is a token of the greatest decline of the Church when the wicked and manifest hypocrites are not only not expelled, but go freely in and out, and even have the ruling power."—*Lange.*

Ver. 10. "Where there are ungodly teachers there is no want of ungodly hearers (Jer. v. 31). Degraded priests a mirror for pastors."—*Starke.*

Ver. 11. "Even in the performance of subordinate service, where one originally stood higher, the grace of God may be with us, provided we let God's humbling of us issue in conversion of heart and look upon the punishment as a righteous recompense. It is not at all necessary that we should, as the world calls it, make a successful career in the clerical profession."—*Lange.*

Ver. 12. "The sins of the preacher in their consequences as regards the life of the community."

Ver. 13. "How great then was the love of the Lord Jesus to Peter and the rest of His disciples after His resurrection, as in sending them that sweet message (Mark xvi. 7), so in readmitting them to the work of the ministry after so foul a revolt! (John xx. 21–23). And doth He not the very same still for His poor sinful servants who desire indeed to fear His name, but are oft overtaken in a fault through infirmity of the flesh?"—*Trapp.*

— "Let us beware of losing precious

opportunities wherein we may have the honour of doing great things for God, such as Mark lost in leaving Paul and Barnabas in Pamphylia, and in not going forward to the glorious work through love of ease or fear of man; and such as the disciples lost in not affording Jesus at His request the sympathy of their prayers and tears, through drowsiness, in Gethsemane." —*Fausset.*

— "The ignominy of failure in ministerial life: personal access to God is hindered, and the office becomes a torment."—*Lange.*

Vers. 15, 16. **Fidelity in God's Service** — 1. Commendable in times of general backsliding. 2. Attracts the Divine notice and approval. 3. Rewarded with special honour and blessing.

— "1. The Lord takes notice of those who serve in His house, who are false and who are faithful in corrupt and apostatising times. 2. God takes pleasure in and honours those who are faithful and constant in His service."—*Greenhill.*

— "The promise of a priesthood of the house of Zadok entirely corresponded to the promise of a shepherd with the name of David. It is the raising up of a people who should be themselves such a priesthood, and the sons of Zadok came into notice only because in connection with them there was an historical ground for taking them as representatives of a right-hearted spiritual community. All was to rise into a new and higher sphere, first the Kingdom of God itself, and then the people who enjoyed its distinctive privileges and experienced its blessings."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 16. "The precepts according to the law should remind us that preachers particularly run within lists, as Paul writes of the Christians. What is fitting for any one else may yet be far from seemly in a preacher. —But it is just those who take things easy that speak most of their severe toil and the heavy labour they have to undergo."—*Lange.*

Ver. 17. "The reason is plain; wool is more apt than linen to contract dirt and breed insects; linen breeds none: besides, this is a vegetable and the other an animal substance. It was an ancient maxim that whatever was taken from a dead body was impure in matters of religion, and should not be permitted to enter into the Temple. The Egyptian priests always wore linen on their bodies and shoes of matting or rushes on their feet. The Mohammedans never write the Koran upon vellum or skin of any kind, as they would consider that as a defilement." —*A. Clarke.*

Vers. 17–24. "The various precepts respecting the purifications and the dress of the priests strikingly impress our minds with the great sanctity which God attaches to the ministry. The bodies of ministers must be preserved in sanctification and in honour. He who does the work and delivers the Word of God must habitually live the servant and friend of God. Nothing in his person, in his food, in his dress, or in his conduct must revolt the faithful against the Word and ordinances of the Lord. On the contrary, all about the priest must be inviting and calculated to recommend religion by a cloud of virtues and engaging qualities. If religion do not make ministers holy and happy, what hope can remain for the people?"—*Sutcliffe.*

Ver. 19. "He who ministers at the Sanctuary must never seem profane, nor a fop in his attire, nor comic in his speech, nor a man of the world in his transactions. He may seem ridiculous to the world, only never conformed to the world."—*Lange.*

Ver. 20. "Seemly, but not remarkable either in defect or excess.—Men of extremes are unfit for the holy ministry."

Vers. 23, 24. **Ministerial Duty—1.** *To point out the clear distinction between the false and the true.* "They shall teach My people the difference between

the holy and profane, and cause them to discern" (ver. 23). 2. *To be just and impartial in controversy.* "They shall judge according to My judgments" (ver. 24). 3. *To observe and enforce obedience to the Divine laws.* "They shall keep My laws and statutes and hallow My Sabbaths" (ver. 24).

Ver. 23. "As their life, so, above all, their teaching ought to preserve the people from defilement and train them to purity."

Ver. 24. "The obligation to hallow the Sabbaths of the Lord is not done away with by the advent of Messiah; for here, in a passage which, in any fair interpretation, can only apply to Christian times, this obligation is expressly insisted on."—*Fausset.*

— "God's word is God's judgment, the righteous Judge, right law and upright judgment.—The servant of God as umpire in disputes. He must not be a party man, but stands over the parties."—*Lange.*

Ver. 25. "They who are the messengers, heralds, and representatives of an eternal life shall neither have their serenity disturbed by the death of believers, which is no death, nor their pure life defiled by the life of the spiritually dead, which is no life.—We too are allowed to wipe our eyes, as God wipes away every tear from the eyes of His saints."

Ver. 28. God the Heritage of the Good — 1. Ensuring all necessary temporal good. 2. Supplying all-sufficing spiritual blessing. 3. Cures all anxiety as to present and future maintenance.

— "All who have first the Kingdom of God for their possession are also truly priests. God feeds them wholly on what is hallowed, and he who will have a blessing in his house must evince love to them."—*Diedrich.*

Ver. 30. "That he may cause the blessing to rest in thine house." Ministerial Maintenance a Source of Family Blessing—1. As it is liberally devised. 2. As it is cheerfully bestowed. 3. As it is gratefully appreciated.

— "It is all in all to the comfort of any house to have the blessing of God upon it, and that blessing to rest in it; to dwell where we dwell and to extend to those who shall come after us. And the way to have the blessing of God upon our estates is to honour God with them, and to give Him and His ministers, Him and His poor, their share out of them. God blesses, He surely blesses the habitation of those who are thus just (Prov. iii. 33); and ministers, by instructing and praying for the families that are kind to them, should do their part towards causing God's blessing to rest there."—*Benson.*

Ver. 31. "In God's service there is no filthy lucre. The Lord purifies everything for them who eat with Him."—*Diedrich.*

The Apportionment of Territory Around the Temple. (Chap. xlv.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. "Divide by lot"—not by casting lots, but by allotment, the several portions being assigned according to rule. "Ye shall offer an oblation"—from a Hebrew root to *heave* or *raise*, because when anything was offered to God the offerer raised the hand. "Unto the Lord an holy portion." The Lord's portion is subdivided into three parts—that for the Sanctuary (vers. 2, 3), that for the priests (ver. 4), and that for the Levites (ver. 5). This provision for the priests and Levites, out of proportion in any actual arrangement, is no doubt intended to symbolise the reverence and honour due to God and expressed by liberality to His services and His ministers. "The length five and twenty thousand reeds, and breadth ten thousand." The English Versio

fills in the ellipsis with *reeds*, according to chap. xliii. 16. Cubits are mentioned in ver. 2, but not here, implying that there cubits alone are meant. Taking each reed at twelve feet, the area of the whole would be a square of sixty miles on each side. The holy portion of the Lord comprised the whole length and only two-fifths of the breadth. The form of a square indicates the settled stability of the community and the harmony of all classes.

Ver. 5. "**A possession for twenty chambers**"—meaning that the Levites, who live in twenty out of the thirty chambers mentioned in chap. xl. 17, shall have the portion of land for a possession.

Ver. 6. "**For the whole house of Israel.**" This portion is to belong to the whole people, not to be subject to the encroachments made by the later kings of Judah (Jer. xxii. 13).

Ver. 7. "**A portion for the prince.**" "The prince's possession is to consist of two halves, one on the west, the other on the east, of the sacred territory. The prince as head of the holy community stands in closest connection with the Sanctuary; his possession, therefore, on both sides must adjoin that which was peculiarly the Lord's."—*Fairbairn.* The definition of the prince's territory was to prevent the oppressions foretold (1 Sam. viii. 14), described (2 Kings xxiii. 35), and reproved (Jer. xxii).

Ver. 10. "**Ye shall have just balances.**" This fitly introduces the strict regulation of quantities in the prescribed offerings.

Ver. 11. "**The ephah and the bath.**" The ephah was in use for dry measure, the bath for liquid. The homer seems to have contained about 75 gallons. The homer was employed as a standard, for in calculation the ephah and bath were both after the homer, according to the standard of the homer, and were to be equal to each other

Ver. 12. "**The shekel shall be twenty gerahs.**" "The standard weights were lost when the Chaldeans destroyed the Temple. The threefold enumeration of shekels, twenty, twenty-five, fifteen probably refers to coins of different value, representing respectively so many shekels, the three collectively making up a maneh. By weighing these together against the maneh a test was afforded whether they severally had their proper weight; sixty shekels in all, containing one coin a fourth of the whole (fifteen shekels), another a third (twenty shekels), another a third and a twelfth (twenty-five shekels)."—*Menochius.*

Ver. 13. "**This is the oblation that ye shall offer.**" Here the offerings are reduced to regular order and the amounts ordained. In later days there were often shortcomings in these respects (Mal. iii. 8). This is obviated and regularity ensured in the new order of things.

Ver. 16. "**All the people shall give this oblation for the prince.**" The people's gifts were to be placed in the hands of the prince, so as to form a common stock out of which the prince was to provide what was necessary for each sacrifice.

Ver. 18. "**In the first month, in the first day of the month.**" It is probable that this celebration is the first in a series of generally recurring ordinances, and in this case we have an addition to the Mosaic ritual.

Ver. 25. "**In the seventh month.**" This is the Feast of Tabernacles (Num. xxix. 12). Of the other great festival, the Feast of Weeks, no mention is made. Ordinances that are literal, though not slavishly bound to the letter of the law, will set forth the catholic and eternal verities of Messian's Kingdom.

HOMILETICS.

Religion the True Basis of Equity.

(Vers. 1–25.)

Humanitarianism professes to construct a morality apart from religion. It is contended that man has within himself the norm or rule of right, and by the exercise of his own will-power he can elect to do that which he ought to do and which it is best to do, and which is for him the highest good. But who is the man referred to? Is it the man formed in God's image, who fell into sin, which must necessarily fetter all moral actions, and who is redeemed by Christ: or is it the man, the pure product of nature, working with the dim light of his own unaided reason, and ignoring every other god but the one centred in his own egoism? The notions of equity in the natural man must necessarily be crude, uncertain, distorted. Man needs, in order to act up to the highest level of justice, not only a revelation of the infallible standard of right, but the aid of Divine power to rectify and strengthen his moral faculties. We have in this chapter an illustration of *Religion as the only true basis of Equity.*

I. **Seen in the impartial distribution of land** (vers. 1–8). Here all is to be fairly and unchangeably allocated and according to the unchallengeable principles of religious equity. The form of a square for the land apportioned to the priests, the prince, and the people indicated the perfect harmony and satisfaction existing among these classes. There was no ground for envy, no temptation or disposition to invade and appropriate the territory of another. Nothing has exhibited the insatiable avarice of man more strikingly than his treatment of the land question: to gratify his greed for possession he has not hesitated to practise duplicity, fraud, and oppression. The tendency has been to accumulate the bulk of the land of a nation in the hands of the few, and scant respect has often been paid to the rights of the many. In the good time coming, when religion, and not simply utility, shall be universally acknowledged as the true basis of equity, the rights of king and people shall be readily recognised, and all occasion for lawless interference with each other's possessions will be abolished (ver. 8).

II. **Seen in the accurate adjustment and use of weights and measures** (vers. 9–13). The moral degeneracy of the Jews was apparent in their business transactions. They tampered with weights and measures, and they were frequently charged with falsifying balances (Amos viii. 5; Hosea xii. 7; Micah vi. 11). There was ample ground for the severe reproof of the prophet that their ways were not equal (chap. xxxiii. 17). Their trickery and over-reaching was an abomination in the sight of God (Prov. xi. 1; xx. 23). The law of the land, however carefully framed and wisely administered, does not always secure perfect justice as between man and man, even when that law is interpreted in the light of equity. The morality of Christian times does not always reach the standard of Pagan honesty. When valuable presents were sent to Epaminondas, the celebrated Theban general, he used to say, "If the thing you desire be good, I will do it without any bribe, even because it is good; if it be not honest, I will not do it for all the goods in the world." It is dangerous to trifle with conscientious scruples: it is better to suffer abuse and misrepresentation than to do wrong. The tender sensitiveness of the conscience, like the delicate bloom of ripe fruit, when it is once damaged can never be restored. **the heart sighs in vain for the exquisite experience of a time of former con-**

scious innocence. It does not *pay* to do wrong. A merchant one day, measuring a piece of cloth and finding it short, asked his clerk to help him to stretch it to the required length. The young man refused on conscientious grounds; he lost his situation, but he afterwards rose into fame and greatness, and his praise was in all the churches. It *does pay* to do right. Religion is the only true basis of equitable dealing as between man and man; it teaches us to render to each other that which is just and equal.

III. **Seen in regulating the ordinances of worship** (vers. 14–25). The exact directions given in these verses regarding the sacrifices indicate that everything connected with Temple-service must be regulated according to the strictest laws of equity. Of all places, the Sanctuary must not be polluted or its worship marred with mutilated offerings and half-hearted devotion. Morality alone, morality divorced from true religion, does not inspire worship—it lacks motive, *lifting* power. We cannot worship God till we know Him, and we never know Him till we love Him and the whole soul is swayed and thrilled with the influence of that love. The laws of ethics are but broken lights of a higher truth, and the fragments have been still more hopelessly shattered and inextricably confused by the infatuated attempts of men to construct them into a philosophy of religion that shall be independent of Divine sanctions. Vain dream! It is a repetition of the task of Sisyphus, who spent his time in rolling a stone up a hill, which as soon as it reached the summit rebounded again to the plain. The equitable demands of Divine worship can alone be met by the aid of genuine religion. The soul must be made good before it can be just to God or man.

LESSONS.—1. *The highest ideal of equity should be expressed in just and equal laws.* 2. *Religion, and not utilitarianism, is the true basis of equity.* 3. *Worship is acceptable to God only as it is in perfect harmony with justice and equity.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–9. The Land Question—1. Should recognise the Divine ownership (ver. 1). 2. Should sanction a distribution in harmony with the rights and claims of all classes (vers. 2–8). 3. Should not allow unjust exactions, or the oppression of the weak by the strong (ver. 8). 4. By its equitable settlement removes temptations to robbery and wrong (ver. 9).

Vers. 1–6. "The frequent occurrence of the number five in these measurements is remarkable, and if we consider that God has fitted in the human hand five instruments by which man fashions to his will the materials of the world—that these are the measure of his power over them—we may be instructed by this passage to believe that every Christian State is bound to provide for the maintenance of pure and undefiled religion, according to the measure of its power in the earth."—*M'Farlan.*

Ver. 1. "A portion of the land was first reserved for the Lord. His Temple required an ample space of ground and His poor required support, and He ever lives their Guardian and constant Friend. If we expect the Lord's blessing we must pay Him homage down to the widow's mite. It is well, therefore, for men when they come to their inheritance to consecrate their fortune by a small offering to Heaven in this way, as it seemed the young ruler in the Gospel wished to do."—*Sutcliffe.*

—"Those who live from God's hand are content with His measure, even when it turns out small and modest.—it ought to be our joy to be near God, to be associated with Him."—*Starck.*

Ver. 3. "The Sanctuary was situated in the centre of all; so ought religion to be the central point of life, and Christ the centre of true religion.—Religion, faith, Christianity, ought not, either in the life of nations or of individuals, to be placed in a corner merely as a tolerated piece of antiquity."

Ver. 4. "The Lord's faithful priests shall dwell beside Him and be with Christ for refreshment and revival from the strife and disquiet of men among whom they are scattered."—*Lange.*

Ver. 7. "Royalty which watches with a paternal eye for the public weal should be amply supported in return. The king is the Lord's minister, and, next to a lot of land for the Lord's house, his support is guaranteed in order and prior to the provision for ministers of religion. His portion was adjacent to the capital because he must reside contiguous to the court and the bench of justice."—*Sutcliffe.*

— "For princes to have their domains is not unjust, but they should not seek to draw everything into these domains."—*Starke.*

Ver. 8. "To protect, but not to fleece.—Governments ought to give good heed to weights, measures, and coinage, and allow no inequalities to creep in.—Knowingly to pass spurious coin is intentional deceit, and so is the clipping of coins in order to lessen their weight.—Unjust gain does not profit the third generation. Lightly come, lightly gone."—*Lange.*

Vers. 9–12. An Ideal Commonwealth—1. Where God is acknowledged and obeyed. 2. Where the ruler is just and powerful. 3. Where oppression and violence are unknown. 4. Where commerce is conducted on principles of strictest equity.

— "1. Princes and magistrates commonly are covetous and cruel. 2. Christianity does not overthrow but establish magistracy. 3. The great thing required of them is to do justice, execute judgment and justice, do wrong to none, neither suffer wrong to be done. 4. Princes are not to rule by prerogative in an arbitrary way, but they themselves are tied to the laws of God and bound by them."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 9. "Self-interest and avarice, that have hitherto wrought so perniciously, shall no longer prevail among the people of the future, but rather righteousness, a spirit of willing sacrifice."—*Hengstenberg.*

— "How happy would nations be if their princes ruled in justice, not for self-aggrandisement, but for the glory of God and as holding their authority under Christ; and how happy the people so governed would be, living in tranquillity, prosperity, and true godliness!"—*Fausset.*

— "This is the voice of God to all the rulers of the earth—'Take away your exactions, do not oppress the people; they are Mine. Abolish all oppressive taxes.'"—*A. Clarke.*

Ver. 10. Just Balances—1. Requisite as between man's actions and his conscience. 2. As between man and man. 3. As between man and God. 4. Will be used in the final judgment.

Ver. 13. "Even the small gifts of the poor, when given in true love, are an acceptable offering (Heb. xiii. 16).—It is reasonable that a man set apart a considerable portion of his income for the glory of God and the support of true worship.—The revenue for spiritual objects is most defrauded."—*Lange.*

Vers. 16–25. A Good King—1. Is interested in the religious welfare of his people (ver. 16). 2. Sustains the ministers of the truth in their sacred work (vers. 17–21). 3. Makes generous provision for the national worship of God (vers. 17, 22–25).

— "These offerings would be perpetual remembrancers to the prince of the sacred character he maintained as the head of such a people, and would supply him by Divine enactment with what was needed to fulfil this part of

his office without resorting to arbitrary and oppressive measures. Expressed more generally, it was a symbol of the perfect harmony and mutual co-operation which should exist in such a holy communion in regard to the public service and glory of God; without constraint or any sort of jarring, the several classes would freely and faithfully do their parts. They were all symbolical of the spiritual and eternal truths of God's Kingdom, and may be variously adjusted, as is now done, in order to make them more distinctly expressive of the greater degree of holiness and purity that is in future times to distinguish the people and service of God over all that has been in the past."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 17. When Christ on the cross consecrated the new Temple, He cancelled our sins.

Vers. 18–25. "This order of solemn services does not follow exactly the order of Moses, of Solomon, or of Ezra, who, on the return from captivity, rearranged the festivals on the Mosaic pattern. Familiar as Ezekiel was with every detail of the Levitical law, this deviation can scarcely have been accidental, and we may herein recognise fresh indications that the whole vision is symbolical, representative of the times when, after the oblation of the one Sacrifice, reconciliation and sanctification were effected for man through the presence of God dwelling in the midst of the people." —*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 18. "At the beginning of the new year of grace, and with the newly rising light, the Temple was again raised up or opened, and the true justification and sanctification through the sacrifice of Christ recognised and proclaimed."—*Lange.*

— Let us begin our years, our months, our weeks, and days with self-examination, repentance, faith, prayer, and devotedness to God, and spend them in like manner.

Ver. 20. "Sin as error and seduction, and error and seduction as sin.—We ought to attend Divine service from beginning to end."—*Lange.*

Ver. 21. "Every solemnisation of the Lord's Supper a fulfilled paschal solemnity.—But our Passover is Christ. —It behoves us to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in spirit and in truth so much more than the Jews the nearer we approach eternity.—Our home is above, to which we draw nearer every moment."—*Lange.*

— "Hereafter there shall be a new Passover and a new Feast of Tabernacles observed in Israel, with ceremonies vastly exceeding in glory those of the same feasts under the Old Testament. The antitypical, perfect, and eternal realities of Christ's manifested Kingdom shall be set forth with observances which, though literal, are not to be slavishly bound down to the letter of the old law, but which shall bring out all the heretofore hidden glories and excellences of that law viewed in its essential spirit."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 22–25. "The sin-offering to be sacrificed first of all, the sins of prince and people being transferred to it as the priest confessed them with his hands on the head of the victim, to show their conviction that the wrath of God must abide on them till transferred to another who should die in their stead; then came the burnt-offerings, to show that, being clear of guilt in His sight, He would accept their service and transfer it with themselves into His heavenly glory by the Spirit, as the burnt offerings were by the fire of the altar." —*M'Farlan.*

Ver. 25. "By these feasts and sacrifices also we are reminded of the spiritual joy the saints have in their communion together under the Gospel and spiritual sacrifices they offer up to God by Christ."—*Greenhill.*

An Imposing Spectacle of Worship in the Temple. (Chap. xlvi.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"The gate of the inner court opened."** The inner east gate of the Temple, otherwise shut, shall be opened on the Sabbath and new moon. This rule does not interfere with chap. xliv. 1. There the *outer* gate is expressly named. This also here remains shut, as indeed chap. xlvii. 2 presupposes that it is shut once for all; otherwise it would have been opened for the prince."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 2. **"The prince shall stand by the post of the gate and the priests prepare his burnt-offering."** The King of the future is the Messiah; the princedom shines in His light, in the brightness of the glory that entered through the east gate, which in view thereof is shut for ever toward the outside. A clear distinction is drawn between prince and priest, to avoid interference with each other's functions.

Ver. 3. **"The people worship at the door of this gate."** The people may not enter the inner gate; they worship at the opened door, through which they catch a glimpse of the altar of burnt-offering, which the prince sees better from a nearer point. The upper pavement on either side of the eastern gate provided room for such worshippers.

Vers. 4, 5. **"The burnt-offering and the meat-offering."** These Sabbath offerings are larger than those of the Mosaic law, to imply that the worship of God is to be conducted by the prince and people in a more munificent spirit of self-sacrificing liberality than formerly. Moses prescribed for the burnt-offering two lambs, and for the meat-offering two tenth deals of flour mingled with oil. **"As he shall be able to give"**—literally, *the gift of his hand.* As he shall be willing to give, the amount being left to the will of the giver. The same meaning in the slightly varied expression of verse 7.

Ver. 6. **"The new moon."** No mention is made here of the blowing of trumpets, which was an important part of the New-Moon Festival (Num. x. 10).

Ver. 10. **"The prince in the midst of them."** Not isolated as at other times, but joining the throng of worshippers at their head, after the example of David (Ps. xlii. 4): the highest in rank animating the devotions of the rest by his presence and example.

Ver. 12. **"The prince shall prepare a voluntary burnt-offering."** Not only is he to perform official acts of worship on holy days and feasts, but in voluntary offerings daily he is to show his individual zeal, surpassing all his people in liberality, and so setting them a princely example.

Ver. 13. **"Thou shalt prepare it every morning."** The evening sacrifice is omitted, because the seer is not enumerating the sacrifices of the law, but selecting a few of them with a particular object in view.

Ver. 16. **"If the prince give a gift unto his sons."** The prince was to be provided with possessions of his own to prevent him having recourse to exactions from his subjects, and lest in the course of time he might be tempted to such exactions, enactments are added to prevent the alienation of the prince's land. The mention of the prince's sons is another argument against Messiah being meant by the prince.

Ver. 20. **"The place where the priests shall boil the trespass offering."** The paschal lamb was to be eaten roasted. The flesh of the other sacrifices was to be sodden or boiled (Lev. vi. 28; 1 Sam. ii. 13; 2 Chron. xxiv. 14). The meat-offering (flour and honey) was baked (Lev. ii. 4).

Ver. 22. **"There were courts joined."**

Smaller courts joined or attached to the walls of the courts, at the corners of the latter.

Ver. 24. "**The places where the ministers boil the sacrifice of the people.**" The careful provision made to keep the offerings of priests and people separate was to prevent collision between them, as the enactments of vers. 16–18 were to secure their respective rights to prince and people All this implies that no longer are the common and unclean to be confounded with the sacred and divine, but that in even the least things, as eating and drinking, the glory of God is to be the aim (1 Cor. x. 31).

HOMILETICS.

The True Worship of Jehovah.

(Vers. 1–15.)

I. Unites all classes in its sacred exercises (vers. 1–3). Prince, priests, and people become one in the act of worship; as they are all alike dependent on God, so they all bow down before Him and adore and praise His goodness. Rank, wealth, display, sink for the time being into insignificance; it is simply a congregation of human souls, with common wants and weaknesses, craving help and blessing from a common Father. The monarch is never so great as when he bends in lowly homage at the feet of God. It is a sublime sight to see king and peasant kneeling together in prayer and adoration. The sincere worship of God is a great power in unifying the human race; inequalities are forgotten, asperities toned down, national peculiarities are more kindly interpreted, and a universal solvent is discovered that melts and blends the hearts of men into a spiritual brotherhood. The grand bond of union in the future will be evidenced in the unceasing worship of Jehovah.

II. Demands generosity in giving proportionate to ability (vers. 4–12). The offerings mentioned here are on a scale of liberality exceeding anything known under the Mosaic regimen. The prince set an example in generous giving, which the people cheerfully imitated. Our gifts to God's cause should not be more nor less than our circumstances justify. It is a great help in worship, and an important feature of it, to come to God's house with a gift in our hand. The more heartily we enter into the spirit of worship the more clearly shall we understand and practise the science of proportionate giving. A missionary was staying with a wealthy Christian philanthropist, whose house was richly ornamented with paintings and sculpture, and was eulogising an exquisite marble statue of Silence—the figure of a boy with his finger to his lips. They had known each other from boyhood, and were free and confidential in conversation. "Do you admire that statue?" asked the friend of the missionary. "I never saw anything in my life equal to it for grace," replied he. "What do you think I gave for it?" "I cannot imagine." "I gave ninety guineas." "And what did you give at the collection to-night?" asked the missionary. "Oh, I gave five pounds." "Five pounds!" said the missionary. "Shame on you! Here you give ninety guineas for a marble statue of Silence and five pounds towards sounding the Gospel all over the earth. That is badly laid out money."

III. Is to be constantly rendered (vers. 13–15). The burnt-offering was presented daily—"every morning"—and the "meat-offering continually by a perpetual ordinance unto the Lord." The dawn of every day should be welcomed with prayer and praise. The day is well begun when it is begun with

God; and the religious character of the day will be decided by the way in which we spend its first hour. It is said that the spider mends its broken web every morning, and always begins in the middle. So we before entering on our daily calling should be careful to repair the broken webs of our lives, beginning each morning with the heart. There is a flower called the Gummy Cystus, which blooms every morning, unfolding a large, beautiful, snow-white flower. By its example this flower invites the soul every morning to unfold the blossom of a holy and fervent devotion. Work is worship, and the life of each day should be one glad psalm (Ps. lv. 17).

LESSONS.—1. *Temple-work is worship.* 2. *Worship promotes the fellowship of hearts.* 3. *The soul reaches its highest good in the worship of God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–5. Sabbath Privileges—1. Rest from anxious toil (ver. 1). 2. An open Sanctuary (ver. 1). 3. An opportunity for all classes to worship God (vers. 2, 3). 4. Should be characterised by generous offerings (vers. 4, 5).

Vers. 1, 2. Royalty and Worship. "1. Princes must not enter into the inner court, and may not change anything in the worship of God. 2. They are to countenance and maintain the worship of God. 3. They must worship the Lord publicly on Sabbath-days and on special occasions as well as other people. 4. They must not impede the worship of God."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 1. "Work does not hinder holiness, but furthers it—1. By preventing temptation. 2. By nourishing experience of God's bounty and providence. 3. By filling the heart with objects of heavenly thought. 4. By stirring up to prayer and praise for each day's mercies."—*Trapp.*

— "There is a time for prayer and a time for work. On work-days we are not to rest as on the Sabbath. He who does not work ought not to eat, whatever his pretences are. The door to the Father, the source of all grace, opens itself to us when the gracious light of the love of God again shines forth, as it often does after great darkness."—*Lange.*

Ver. 2. "The chief magistrate was always obliged to attend the public worship of God, as well as the priest, to show that the civil and ecclesiastical States were both under the same government of the Lord, and that no one was capable of being prince or priest who did not acknowledge God in all his ways. Ungodly priests and profligate magistrates are a curse to any land."—*A. Clarke.*

— "The gate shall not be shut until the evening. The gate is open till the evening; be ready therefore. When the Bridegroom has once gone in, the gate is shut and fools excluded (Matt. xxv.)."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 3. In the old covenant it is said "before the Lord;" in the new covenant "in the Lord."

Vers. 4–15. "The offerings here prescribed are generally in excess of those enjoined by the law, to note the greater devotion and magnificence under the new state of things. Still, as of old, there was a certain liberty left to give in such proportion as the will might prompt or the ability permit, and the seer contemplates in his vision of better times a willing king and a people ready to give of their substance to the utmost of their means."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 4. "The Lord's day is a day in which especially liberal gifts to the Lord's cause are the appropriate accompaniments of the worship of the Sanc-

tuary, attesting that we do not desire to offer to our best Benefactor a service which costs us nothing (2 Sam. xxiv. 24). If the Israelite was not to appear before the Lord at the Passover empty (Ex. xxiii. 15), much less ought the Christian, who enjoys such vastly superior privileges, to offer grudging and stinted gifts."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 8–10. **Religious Decorum**—1. Should be rigidly observed by king and people. 2. Regulates the manner of entering and leaving the Sanctuary. 3. An aid in the public worship of God.

Ver. 8. "The influence of love shall extend into the whole world from the south to the north, so that they from the north and from the south shall go to meet one another, in order to receive and embrace one another as brethren. —No one should go out of the church as he came into it; he should always take home with him something for his edification (Eccles. iv. 17; Acts xvi. 14)."—*Lange.*

Vers. 9–15. "A beautiful picture of a religious people; the highest in rank freely mingling with the mass of worshippers, and inspiriting their devotions by the elevating influence of his presence and example. But to show that his worship was not merely to be of a public and official nature, that it should spring from a heart truly alive to Divine things, the prophet passes from those holiday services to the voluntary offerings, which the prince was also to present to the Lord. The proper head of a religious people, he was to surpass them all in the multitude and variety of his acts of homage and adoration." —*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 9. "1. The Lord expects not only prince and priests to worship Him in a public way, but the people also. 2. The way of God's servants is a straight and right-forth way. 3. The shortness of man's life is here represented: he enters the world, goes on a little way, and then goes out of it again."—*Greenhill.*

— "1. Teaches us not to turn our backs upon the holy ordinances. 2. To make straight paths for our feet, and be making daily progress towards perfection. 3. That our memories are frail, and here we shall meet with many things that will withdraw us from thinking upon God. 4. That our life is but short—a passage from one gate to another. One being asked, 'What is life?' made an answer answerless, for he presently went his way."—*Trapp.*

Ver. 10. **The Divine Leader**—1. Is ever in the midst of His people. 2. Guides to the best spheres of religious and secular work. 3. Superintends and overrules all the changes of human life. 4. Guarantees all needed help in the Church and in the world.

— "Prince and peasant stand on the same level in worshipping before God, who is no respecter of persons, yet those in exalted positions, as princes and nobles, exercise a powerful influence over men, and may accordingly be the instruments of great good when they set a godly example before those beneath them."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 13–15. **Morning Prayer.** 1. A duty we owe to God. 2. Decides the character of the day's experience. 3. Essential to religious growth. 4. Should be offered in an earnest and thankful spirit.

Ver. 15. "Grace makes the heart free, and so also willing. As God's grace is new every morning, so also ought our devotion to Him to be renewed every morning. Our whole life should be a sacrifice from morning to night, and next morning again. Since Christ's appearance the night has disappeared and the day has come; there are now only morning sacrifices."—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS.

JUSTICE AND GENEROSITY.

(Vers. 16–18.)

I. That property rights are founded in universal justice. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," and it is He who gives power to get wealth. Property acquired by industry, merit, and by just regard to the rights of others is secured by recognised law. Yet the law knows nothing of absolute ownership: man has but a life-interest in his possessions, for we brought nothing into this world, and we can carry nothing out. The law which protects property also limits the exercise of the owner's power over it.

II. That ample possessions afford opportunity for acts of corresponding generosity. Property has its duties as well as its rights. Great wealth means great responsibility; it furnishes increased facilities for doing good. Few men give in proportion to their means. Liberality is measured not by what a man gives, but by what he has left. It is degrading to spend one's life in getting and securing what we get; the soul is shrivelled into a miserly selfishness. Giving expands our human sympathies and widens a man's outlook. There is a pleasure in accumulating, but there is a nobler pleasure in giving. Gonsalvo, the great Spanish captain, used to say, "Never stint your hand. There is no way of enjoying one's property like giving it away;" and he acted up to his own precept.

III. That it is neither justice nor generosity to give away what belongs to another (vers. 16–18). The prince was amply provided for that he might be generous both to his family and his servants; but he was prohibited from indulging generosity by seizing the possessions of others. Some are generous enough with what belongs to others. It is mistaken generosity; it is fraud and robbery. Justice demands that a man must be generous only with what is his own. The prince gains power and affection, not by violating but by guarding the rights of his subjects. Property is sweetened and seasoned by acts of judicious liberality.

LESSONS.—1. *Property is a sacred trust, for which we are accountable to God.* 2. *Property acquired by oppression is unsafe.* 3. *We must be just before we can be generous.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 16–18. The Duty of the Wealthy—1. To provide for their own family (ver. 16). 2. To be liberal towards their dependents (ver. 17). 3. To respect the laws by which their possessions are governed (vers. 16, 17). 4. To avoid oppression and protect the rights of others (ver. 18).

— "It is an exhibition, by an individual trait, of the pure righteousness and settled order which should pervade the Kingdom of God when set up in its new and more perfect form. Everything should now be ruled by the principles of eternal rectitude, and no license given, no occasion even, or pretext afforded for the usurpations of tyrannical violence."—*Fairbairn.*

Ver. 17. "As Alexander the Great,

who, going to subdue a great part of the habitable world, gave away to his servants almost all he had, and when one of his officers asked what he would leave for himself, he answered, 'Hope.'" —*Trapp.*

— "He who is profuse in giving is easily compelled to take from others what belongs to them."—*Hengstenberg.*

Ver. 18. "Ill accidents attend such princes as affecting to be absolute in power, will be too resolute in will or dissolute in life, oppressing their subjects to enrich their servants and parasites."—*Trapp.*

— "How blessed shall that state be wherein alike the temptation from without and the inclination from within to do wrong shall no longer have place! This is the model towards which we ought to aspire; and in this respect this picture of the future Israel may serve as the ideal according to which, in the spirit if not in the letter, our State politics should be framed."—*Fausset.*

HOMILETICS.

The Moral Significance of Daily Food.

(Vers. 19–24.)

I. **That the supply of daily food is a constant evidence of the Divine care.** There is not a single meal for which we are not indebted to the Divine thoughtfulness and blessing. God smiles upon the soil, and it teems with plenty for man and beast. The wants of the tiniest insect, the most solitary bird, are not overlooked. Famine is man's handiwork—the result of sin, of indolence, or lack of foresight, and is sometimes a punishment for his lavish extravagance and wrong-doing. God is the munificent benefactor and food-provider for His countless offspring (Ps. cxlv. 16).

II. **That all the possible needs of man are satisfied in connection with Divine worship.** The priests who ministered before the Lord and the people who worshipped were fed with the sacrifices they offered (vers. 20–25). Workers for God are promised an unfailing supply of physical food (Ps. xxxvii. 3). Their work is not to suffer by undue anxiety concerning temporal things. He who provides for the higher needs of man will not neglect the lower: the greater includes the lesser (Matt. vi. 33).

III. **That every meal should be enjoyed in a spirit of devout thankfulness.** Every meal should be a miniature sacrament. We should remember that God always sits down at the table with His children; His presence makes every meal a joyous feast. Eating and drinking cannot degenerate into sensual excess when we remember the Provider of the feast is present. We can make no adequate return for His goodness, but we can and must be thankful. A thankful heart glorifies God (1 Tim. iv. 4; 1 Cor. x. 31; Phil. iv. 6).

Lessons.—1. *The law of supply and demand is Divinely regulated.* 2. *There is no lack to those who serve God.* 3. *The prayer is Divinely taught*—"*Give us this day our daily bread.*"

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 19. "In the Kingdom of God, as in the kingdom of nature, and in the full sense of the expression, everything has its own place. Only the

things of men are in disorder because they are sinners, and sin is disorder in every respect."—*Lange.*

Ver. 20. "Ministers should indite good matters in their hearts for the use of the people, and then their tongues shall be as the pen of a ready writer. They shall not feed their hearers with crude and undigested stuff, but such as is well boiled and baked with the fire of the Holy Spirit, kindled on the hearth of their own hearts, that from the heart they may speak to the heart."—*Trapp.*

— "To cook is to bring to a proper condition, so that the food tastes well and is agreeable; so ought also the truth to be prepared.—Is not homiletics a kind of sacred cookery?"—*Lange.*

Ver. 24. **Spiritual Food**—1. Should be studiously prepared by the faithful minister. 2. Should be partaken of by the minister himself. 3. Should be provided for the worship of the Sanctuary. 4. Is essential in nourishing and strengthening the soul.

— "In God's Church there shall always be provision both for His ministers and people. Those who have but from hand to mouth have their bread hot, as it were, from God's hand, which is best of all."—*Trapp.*

— "Thus in one part of the house was food for the body, and in another food for the soul. In this view heaven shall greatly exceed earth, for there we shall not need the bread that perisheth. He that eateth of the tree of life shall live for ever."—*Sutcliffe.*

The Vision of the Holy Waters Issuing from the Temple.

(Chap. xlvii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—Ver. 1. **"The house eastward."** The house is the Temple itself; the waters issued from beneath the south-east corner and flowed along the south of the porch which projected into the inner court.

Ver. 2. **"There ran out waters on the right side."** "The waters flow eastward—towards the Kedron, thence towards the Jordan, and so along the Ghor to the Dead Sea. The main point in the picture is the rapid augmentation from a petty stream into a mighty river, not by the influx of side-streams, but by its own self-supply from the sacred miraculous source in the Temple."—*Henderson.*

Ver. 3. **"To the ankles."** This may coincide with the step gained in the baptism of Cornelius (Acts x.) and the opening of the Church to the Gentiles.

Ver. 4. **"To the knees—loins."** The mission of St Paul and Barnabas (Acts xiii. 1–4) is another marked epoch in the Church's history; and the time of St Paul's martyrdom denotes an increase in the Gentile Church, which corresponds with the waters reaching to the loins.

Ver. 5. **"Waters to swim in."** "When under Constantine the Roman Empire had become Christian, the Church may be contemplated as the full river, to flow on throughout time to the final completion of Isaiah's prophecy, xi. 9."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 7. **"Very many trees."** Trees were the natural consequence of abundance of water (Ps. i. 3; Rev. xxii. 2). The luxuriant fertility of the ground on the shore of the Dead Sea under the fresh springs of Engedi well illustrate this.

Ver. 8. **"Into the sea, the waters shall be healed."** The Dead Sea, covering the guilty cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. In its bituminous waters no vegetable or animal life is said to be found. But now death is to give

place to life in Judea and throughout the world, as symbolised by the healing of these death-pervaded waters (John iv. 14; Rev. xxii. 2, 3).

Ver. 9. "**Whithersoever the rivers shall come.**" Heb., "the two rivers." This new river is to come into the Dead Sea through the same plain as the Jordan. The Jordan always flowed, but now, when another river comes in and two rivers flow into the sea, the waters shall be healed. *Hengstenberg* interprets the two rivers as meaning strong river.

Ver. 10. "**From Engedi unto Eneglaim.**" Engedi, now Ain-Jidy, west of the Dead Sea, David's place of refuge. En-eglaim, on the confines of Moab, near where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea. These limits comprise between them the whole Dead Sea. "**Their fish shall be according to their kinds.**" "Jerome quotes an ancient theory that there are 153 kinds of fishes, all of which were taken by the apostles (John xxi. 11), and not one remained uncaptured, signifying that both the noble and base-born, the rich and the poor, and every class, are being drawn out of the sea of the world to salvation."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 11. "**Not be healed; given to salt.**" "Those districts in which the salt-deposits proper were formerly found shall henceforth be waste places. The thought is this—Only those who bar themselves against the gracious stream of Divine love and are unwilling to regain health are henceforth to be given over to the curse, continuing to exist as monuments thereof."—*Hävernick.* What is given to salt is entirely forfeited to death.

Ver. 12. "**Shall grow all trees for meat**"—trees of life-giving and life-restoring virtue shall bloom, similar in properties to and exceeding in number the tree of life in Eden (Rev. ii. 7; xxii. 2, 14). "**Whose leaf shall not fade**"—expressing not only the unfailing character of the heavenly medicine of the tree of life, but also that the graces of the believer, which are the leaves, and his deeds, which are the fruits that flow from those graces, are immortal (Ps. i. 3; Jer. xvii. 8; Matt. x. 42; 1 Cor. xv. 58).

Ver. 13. "**This shall be the border.**" Substantially the same as Num. xxxiv.; there the description begins with the south, here with the north. "**Joseph shall have two portions**"—according to the original promise of Jacob to Joseph (Gen. xlviii. 5, 22; Joshua xiv. 4.) Joseph's sons were given the birthright forfeited by Reuben, the first-born (1 Chron. v. 5). The special mention of Joseph's portions was to express that the twelve portions were to be exclusive of Levi's land, which was to be provided out of the oblation.

Ver. 14. "**One as well as another.**" Ezekiel is speaking of tribes, not individuals. Each tribe is to have an equal breadth of land assigned to it.

Ver. 15. "**The way of Hethlon to Zedad**"—on the north boundary of Canaan. Names of places in the actual northern border are given, not to mark exact geographical position, but to show that the original promise will be fulfilled.

Ver. 16. "**Hamath**"—at the foot of Mount Hermon, on the Orontes. "**Berothah**"—probably the same as Berothai, a city in Syria conquered by David (2 Sam. viii. 8). "**Hazar-hatticon**"—the middle Hazar, to distinguish it from Hazar-enan. "**Hauran**"—Auranitis, a tract in Syria, south of Damascus.

Ver. 18. "**Unto the east sea**"—the Dead Sea.

Ver. 19. "**From Tamar**"—a village near the southern end of the Dead Sea. "**To Kadesh**"—on the borders of the Wilderness of Sin, where the children of Israel strove with Moses. "**The river to the great sea.**" Literally, "riverward to the great sea." By the river is meant a torrent-stream

entering the Mediterranean near Rhinocolura, now El Arish. This is the river of Egypt mentioned in Num. xxxiv. 5.

Ver. 22. "And to the strangers that sojourn among you." Here is quite a new feature in the distribution of the land. Not only the Israelites by descent, but those who join themselves to Israel by allegiance to the true God, shall have a right of inheritance. The difference which existed under the old covenant between Jew and Gentile is now at last done away (Rom. x. 12; Gal. iii. 28; Col. iii. 11).

HOMILETICS.

The River of the Water of Life.

(Vers. 1–12.)

I. **Has its source in the Temple of God** (ver. 1, 2). Not from the Temple as such, but from the presence and activity of Him whose glory filled the Temple. All the spiritual blessings that now enrich the world appear to issue from the Church of God, and so they do; but not from the Church as an organisation, but from Him who gives life, form, and stability to the organisation itself. This important fact is liable to be overlooked. Ezekiel had gone round the Temple repeatedly, prospecting, measuring, admiring, until his soul was filled with amazement at its colossal proportions and gorgeous ritual; but not till it was specially revealed to him did he see the waters issuing from under the threshold of the house, and became aware of their mysterious and Divine source. So we are apt to be so absorbed in contemplating the outward structure and vast movements of the Church as to lose sight for the time of the Divine power that gives vitality and meaning to the whole. It is a blessed moment for us when we are brought by the Spirit to "the door of the house" and shown the secret of all this mighty energy. It is our wisdom frequently to wait in meditation and prayer at the threshold of God's house, the fountain-head of all blessing, until our souls are penetrated with the thought that the excellency of the power in Temple-work is not of man, but of God. Then we can say with David, "All my springs are in Thee" (Ps. lxxxvii. 7).

II. **Widens and deepens in its progressive outflow** (vers. 3–5). Beginning as a small rill of water at the Temple threshold, the river, within a little more than a mile's space, rapidly widens and deepens so as to be unfordable, and this not by the aid of contributary streams, but from itself. Here we see the miraculous character of the river and its evident ideal teaching, as a stream rising at the top of a mountain, feeding itself and so quickly augmenting, is at variance with all known natural laws. It is a type of the River of the Water of Life, flowing in Gospel channels, and spreading and deepening among the nations of the earth. What a suggestive study to trace the course of this river in its steady advances through the world! In many places the wilderness has been transformed into a garden of Eden. Our knowledge of Divine truth, like the waters of the Sanctuary, is shallow at first, but should grow in depth and preciousness with the years. So in our experience of spiritual things: there should be constant progress from grace to grace.

III. **Imparts fertility and blessing wherever it flows** (vers. 6–12). This mystic river produced extraordinary effects. Wherever it circulated vegetation was quickened, trees remarkable for fruitfulness and medicinal properties sprang up on its banks, and the bituminous waters of the Dead Sea, cured of

their deadly poison, swarmed with fish. Barrenness gives place to fertility and abundance, and the river-course is a scene of animation and increasing activity. So the Gospel—the River of the Water of Life—brings life, health, beauty, and fruitfulness wherever it comes. Dead souls are quickened into life, diseased souls healed, feeble souls strengthened, and the spiritual life of believers is made more intense and productive. Like the fabled goddess whose pathway was beautified with flowers which sprang up wherever she set her feet, so the course of the Gospel river may be distinctly traced by the flowers and fruits of grace that adorn and enrich its banks.

LESSONS.—1. *Christ is the source and His Word the channel of soul-refreshing life.* 2. *Wherever the Gospel spreads it produces life and fruitfulness.* 3. *True religion is progressive, and flourishes best by disseminating itself.*

THE VISION OF THE WATERS.

(Ver. 9.)

We take the holy waters to be the emblems of the Gospel—that wondrous scheme of mercy, perfected by the atonement of Christ, made vital by the everlasting Spirit and adapted to the salvation of the world.

I. **The source of the holy waters.** While through the Temple come to us the tidings of our peace, the blessing itself does not originate there, but is conveyed to it from a source invisible and afar. In God's great provision for the restoration of the fallen race there are both instrumental and efficient agencies. He has appointed means, and a Divine and perpetual resident to infuse those means with life. They who love the river of the Temple are the likeliest, walking on its banks, to find its source issuing from the throne. While we thus appreciate the uses of the Temple as an instrumentality of blessing, and rejoice in the waters as they flow, we must remember always that they issue from the foundation of the house and have their springs in the everlasting hills; in other words, that God is the one source of life. Though the Saviour has ascended up on high, He has shed forth His Spirit. That Spirit lives on earth, the perpetuator of the Gospel impression, the inspirer of all thought that is holy, the great and living agent in the conversion of mankind. Men say the truth is power, but it is not, alone. It is feeble as the pliant osier or the bruised reed against the malignant enmity of evil. But let the Spirit animate it, and it shall overcome all hostility, and be brave and mighty to prevail.

II. **The progress of the holy waters.** You observe that in the context the progress of these waters is said to have been gradual and constant. The prophet saw them first reaching to the ankles, then to the knees, then to the loins, and then they became a river too deep to be forded, even a river to swim in. There was no ceasing in the flow, there was no ebbing of the waters; they flowed gradually and constantly in the ever-deepening stream. And this is only a description of the progress of the Gospel of Christ. Small and feeble in its beginnings—those trembling but earnest fishermen, its earliest preachers—with wealth and rank and patronage and power all arrayed against its progress—with Cæsars conspiring to strangle it, and armies marched out against its fugitive sons—how marvellous was its triumph! And though after the establishment of Christianity there was a seeming eclipse of faith, and corruptions blemished the comeliness of the bride of Christ, the gradual progress among

the nations did not cease. One after another they received her teachings and submitted to her sway. Insensibly she moulded the institutions of society and stamped upon them her own image. Sanguinary codes were relaxed; unholy traffic terminated; cruelty had her arm paralysed and her sword blunted; fraud and lust and drunkenness became no longer things of glorying, but of shame; there was a gradual uplifting in the moral health, as if there flowed around the people the bracing air-waves of a purer atmosphere; and men wondered whence the healing came. The river had done it all: flowing on, now through the darkling brake, and now over the open plain; now fertilising the swards upon its banks; now rejoicing in the depth of its own channel—imperceptible almost in the increasing volume of its waters to those who continually beheld it, and yet, to those that gazed only at intervals, seemed to have both widened and deepened every day. And it is rolling on still. Perhaps there never was an age of such quickened religious activity as the one in which we are privileged to live. There are two thoughts suggested by this gradual and constant progress of the Gospel. The first encourages our faith; the second reminds us of our responsibility. If we believe, with all the firmness of a settled conviction, that the Gospel is of God, we may rest in the assurance that it must and will prevail; and this hearty faith in its triumphant destiny will save us from the extremes of feeling—from undue elation in seasons of unusual promise, and from unusual depression in seasons of peculiar languor. The other thought addresses itself solemnly to ourselves. It is quite impossible for us to live in times like ours, when not only the ordinary religious privileges exist and are enjoyed, but when there is so much of special unction with the Word, and such large and manifest workings of the Holy Ghost, without entailing an added amount of responsibility. Beware of attributing the Holy Spirit's work to evil agency. That is marvellously like the sin that has no forgiveness. Beware of setting yourselves in an attitude of resistance to good influences. The waters wear the stones, but do not change their nature. Beware of delaying yourselves into hardness of heart. The waters petrify sometimes, and there are some moral petrifactions, alas! which cannot be broken even by the hammer of the Word.

III. **The efficacy of the holy waters.** How complete and how effectual the healing! "Everything shall live whither the river cometh." And this is true of the Gospel. Not only can it reach every man, but each part of every man. Life for the understanding, that it may no longer be smitten by error—life for the imagination, that its strange fires may be quenched and a purer flame be kindled in their stead—life for the memory, that it may no longer be haunted by the wraiths of ghostly sins—life for the affections, that they may revel in a pure attachment which is not idolatry, ever increasing and yet ever satisfied—life for the whole nature, that it may not be dead in trespasses and sins—life for the destiny, that it may not even be sullied by the shadow of death, but exult in an ever-brightening inheritance through an eternal day. It shall flow into the *desert*, and love to God shall be implanted where was formerly enmity, and the whole nature shall be turned about to serve Him. It shall flow into the *sea*, and though the proud waves shall resist its entrance, it shall overcome their frantic waters and heal them of their plague. Some of you have seen, as I have, a very fine illustration of this, so far as earthly things can illustrate heavenly in nature's bounteous kingdom. I stood last summer at the point of confluence, near the fair city of Geneva, where two great rivers meet but do not mingle. Here the Rhone, "the arrowy Rhone," rapid and beautiful, pours on, its waters of that heavenly blue which it is almost worth a pilgrimage to see; there the Arve, turbid and muddy, partly from the glaciers from which it is so largely fed, and partly from the clayey soil which it upheaves in its impetuous

path, brawls hoarsely in its passionate course; and for a long distance beyond the point of junction they roll side by side with no barrier between them but their own innate repulsions, each making now and then an encroachment upon the other, but beaten back again into its own domain. Like mighty rival forces of good and evil do they seem, and for a long time the issue is doubtful. But far down the long valley, if you look again, you find that the frantic Arve is mastered, and the Rhone has coloured the entire surface of the stream with its own emblematic and beautiful blue. I thought, as I gazed upon it, that it symbolised the long-protracted conflict between truth and error; but in meditating upon the flowing of these healing waters, and reading that they shall flow into the sea and heal it, the vision of the scene rose up before me, fresh and vivid as the facts of yesterday."—*W. Morley Punshon, D.D.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–12. "The effect of the establishment of the mountain of the house of the Lord on the top of mountains, or of Christianity generally, is a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit signified by these waters. As they were not to be seen before the issue of the man with the measuring-line, they are to accompany the preaching of the Word by the ministers of Christ, and the operations of the Spirit shall become the more admirable and profound as they proceed in their spread over all the world, as is signified by their increasing depth. By them shall the evil influences of the world be healed and everlasting life conveyed to all that will receive them. Still, some shall harden even then under its influence, and become more rank and nauseous in sin than before, as is signified by the unhealed bays."—*M'Farlan.*

— "Issuing as this stream does from the threshold of the Temple, from the very foot of the throne of God, it must be, like all the special manifestations of God to His Church, itself of a spiritual nature, and only in its effects productive of outward material good. It is the efflux of that infinite fulness of life and blessing which is treasured up in His spiritual Temple, and continually pours itself forth as the operations of His grace proceed among men. It is emphatically a river of life. Wherever it is experienced, the barren soil of nature fructifies, the dead live again, the soul is replenished with joy and gladness. Instead of spending itself, like the streams of nature, as it advances through the moral deserts of the world, it multiplies and grows, until corruption is changed into incorruption, mortality is swallowed up of life, and the earth, which God had cursed for man's sin, is transformed into the inheritance of the saints in light."—*Fairbairn.*

Vers. 1–5. "Ezekiel's Temple, with its ritual, ministers, and congregation, symbolises the presence of Jehovah in the midst of a loyal people. The waters are the blessings which flow from this source to animate and refresh all the inhabitants of the earth. The deepening of the waters in their course shows the continual deepening of spiritual life and multiplication of spiritual blessings in the growth of the Kingdom of God."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

— "In the Kingdom of God things proceed from little to great: in the kingdoms of the world often from great to little. Satan begins his things with lofty impetuosity, but finally they end in nothing and everything comes to disgrace."—*Hafenreffer.*

Ver. 1, 2. **The Progress of Truth.** "1. As it is Christ who makes known the things of the Temple, so He makes known some at one time, some at another. 2. The waters of the Gospel, the gifts and graces of the Spirit, flow from Zion. 3. These spiritual waters, although they flow from Zion, Christ

is the fountain and original of them. 4. Sanctuary waters are not common but choice mercies; they are right-side mercies, south-side blessings."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 1. **The Gradualness of Divine Revelation**—1. Accommodated to our imperfect faculties. 2. Suited to our varying circumstances. 3. Educative in its process. 4. Enables us more clearly to grasp the meaning and grandeur of the truths unfolded.

Vers. 3–9. "**The Atheistic Idea.** It is affirmed that Christianity is waning because of the advancement of science. The business of the scientist is with matter. There is something back of matter—a force beneath life. No painter, there is no picture: no God, there is no nature. What doctrine has science demolished? 1. *Has science done away with the Incarnation?* The scientist knows that the sum of the history of nature is made up by the entrances at epochs of higher types of being. Are not all these appearances prophecies of the grand entrance of the Higher Being? 2. *Has science done away with the Atonement?* The law everywhere manifest is the dependence of one creature on another. 3. *Has science done away with sin?* Sin is as much a fact, a phenomenon of human life, as the circulation of the blood. 4. *Where is Christianity waning?* In Germany? Compare this century with the last. A short time ago thousands of students flocked to the great universities to hear the doctrines of Fichte, Hegel, Kant, and the Rationalists of Tubingen. Now scarcely a class of twenty can be collected for that purpose. In France? Compare this century with the times when a deluge of blood followed the blasphemies of Rousseau, D'Alembert, Diderot, and Voltaire. In England? Compare the Britain of to-day with the Britain of yesterday, when Chubb, Hume, and Bolingbroke could sneer at the story of the Cross—when the clergy were immoral. In America? Compare it with the time when the students in our colleges called themselves by the names of leading French atheists. Where will you find such a college to-day? 5. *What is the motive-power of science?* Compare the ages of faith and the ages of scepticism and see the results. How high has science lifted the shadows that rest on the human heart? It is only this blessed religion, this radiance from the throne of God, that can lighten the gloom."—*Homiletic Monthly.*

Vers. 3–5. **The Temple-River emblematic of Religion in the different stages of Human Life.** 1. *Childhood.* "The waters were to the ankles" (ver. 3). Religion may be shallow and yet genuine. 2. *Youth.* "The waters were to the knees" (ver. 4). Still exposed to much of the world and its attractions, yet standing in the truth. 3. *Manhood.* "The waters were to the loins" (ver. 4). In the midway of life's struggle, but deepening in piety. 4. *Old age.* "Waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over" (ver. 5). A more prolonged and profound study of the truth revealing its unfathomable vastness and prompting the strongest veteran-swimmer to exclaim, "Oh, the depth of the riches!" (Rom. xi. 33).

— "Holy Scripture and its revelations also resemble these sacred waters, in that whosoever searches into them will find some parts intelligible to all who sincerely desire to know them. Other parts require a deeper investigation; others a deeper still; and others are beyond our depth, and in respect to these, we can only adore the infinitude of God's unsearchable wisdom, and humbly wait for His own time of revealing their now hidden meaning. The growth of grace in the individual soul, similarly, is a progressive work, beginning with but a small stream from the fountain-head, but sure to go on increasing until it is expanded into the boundless and unfathomable river of heavenly pleasures (Ps. xxxvi. 8)."—*Fausset.*

— "This vision may be applied—1. *To the gradual discoveries of the plan of*

salvation. (1.) In the patriarchal ages. (2.) In the giving of the Law. (3.) In the ministry of John the Baptist. (4.) In the full manifestation of Christ by the Holy Ghost. 2. *To the growth of a believer in the grace and knowledge of God.* (1.) The seed of the Kingdom. (2.) The blade from that seed. (3.) The ear out of that blade. (4.) The full corn in that ear. 3. *To the discoveries a penitent believer receives of the mercy of God in his salvation.* (1.) A little child, born of God, he begins to taste and feed on the heavenly food. (2.) He grows up and increases in stature and strength, and becomes a young man. (3.) He becomes matured in the Divine life, and has his spiritual senses exercised so as to become a father in Christ. 4. *To the progress of Christianity.* (1.) A few poor fishermen. (2.) Afterwards many Jews. (3.) Then the Gentiles of Asia Minor and Greece. (4.) The continent and isles of Europe. (5.) Now spreading through Africa, Asia, and America, at present these waters are no longer a river, but an immense sea; and the Gospel-fishers are daily bringing multitudes of souls to God."—*A. Clarke.*

— **The Spread of the Gospel.** "1. Christ is the architect and measurer of all things belonging to His Church. 2. The motion of Sanctuary waters is not accidental, but according to Divine appointment. 3. The doctrine of the Gospel is never rightly understood unless taught by Christ. 4. The doctrine of the Gospel, the conversion of sinners, and the graces of the Spirit proceed gradually. 5. The Gospel has depths and mysteries no human understanding can comprehend. 6. Sanctuary waters afford comfort to the saints in their deepest distresses."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 5. "There was no such natural course of waters in the place, nor is it imaginable that in three miles or thereabouts the waters should so rise; but it is emblematical, hath a deep mysterious meaning, and includes spiritual [illegible] and their wonderful growth from small beginnings, and these from the Temple."—*Pool.*

— "This marks the rich and overflowing grace which God designs to shed down on the earth in the Gospel age and in the glory of the latter day; and it apprises believers that they should not remain in a loitering state, trampling the shallow waters of grace, but go on to a deeper baptism of the Spirit till they can swim in the abounding streams."—*Sutcliffe.*

— "Representing the fathomless depth of the Scriptures, which is such that we may well do by it as the Romans did by a lake, the depth whereof they could not sound, and dedicated it to Victory: also the abundance of spiritual graces in the Church, the love of Christ which passeth all knowledge, and the over-abounding goodness of God. Speaking of this subject, Chrysostom said: 'I am like a man digging in a deep spring; I stand here, and the water rises upon me; I stand there, and still the water rises upon me. It is indeed a sea that has neither bank nor bottom.'"—*Trapp.*

Ver. 6. "Hast thou seen this?" **A Suggestive Question**—1. *As asked by the well-informed.* He knows more than I do, or why the question? 2. *As addressed to the anxious inquirer.* This may meet my case. 3. *As addressed to the thoughtless and indifferent.* There is a world of knowledge hitherto closed to him. 4. *Indicates there is much we miss for want of a keener insight into truth.*

Vers. 7–10. **Fishers in Gospel Waters.** "1. The waters of the Gospel have their own course. 2. That people without the Gospel are like the Dead Sea (ver. 8). 3. The waters of the Sanctuary have curing and quickening virtue (vers. 8, 9). 4. The preachers of the Gospel are fishers (ver. 10). 5. These Gospel-fishers catch fish of all sorts (ver. 10)."—*Greenhill.*

Vers. 8, 11. **The Power of the Gospel**—1 Seen in its penetrating the most unlikely places. "The desert—

the Dead Sea" (ver. 8). 2. Efficacious in giving life and healing to all who accept it. "The waters shall be healed" (ver. 8). 3. Inefficacious where it is resisted and rejected. "The miry places and marshes shall be given to salt" (ver. 11).

Ver. 8. "God's Sanctuary a well-spring of life for the Dead Sea of the world (Ps. lxxxvii. 7). God's thoughts of peace over the abysses of the world's wretchedness. In other cases a clear and wholesome stream which flows into a muddy and putrid lake becomes corrupt: it is otherwise with the Gospel, which brings recovery and health to the earthly-minded heart. It is a power of God, but man will not let the power work."—*Lange.*

Ver. 11. "Those whom the Gospel waters of life do not reach, through their own indolence and carnality, shall be given over to everlasting barrenness; nor can any more awful punishment be imagined than that the sinner should be given up to the unrestricted and everlasting workings of his own sin, bitterness, and filthiness."—*Fausset.*

— The Hebrew language often expresses irremediable barrenness and unprofitableness by being given up to salt, salt being equivalent to barrenness in that language. When Abimelech destroyed Shechem he sowed the ground whereon it stood with salt, to denote that it should never be cultivated or inhabited again (Judges ix. 45).

— "Unsound, rotten parts, neither sea nor yet sound ground, an emblem of hypocrites. Low land, sopped with the overflowings of unhealthful waters, neither fit to breed fish as the sea, nor bear trees as the land."—*Pool.*

Vers. 9–12. Spiritual Influence—1. Vitalises all it touches (ver. 9). 2. The active principle of fertility and plenty (vers. 9, 10, 12). 3. Cannot be resisted without disaster (ver. 11). 4. Is ever flowing from the Divine Temple. "Because they issued out of the sanctuary" (ver. 12). 5. Is both the food and medicine of the soul. "The fruit shall be for meat, and the leaf for medicine" (ver. 12).

Ver. 10. "The ministers of the Church are compared to fishers because of the contempt with which they are regarded by the rich and powerful of this world; because of their labour by day and night, in heat and cold; because of the fruitlessness of their labour at times—'We have caught nothing;' because of the dangers they incur in stormy weather; because of their confidence, which, as in the case of the husbandman, must rest on God; because of the various kinds of implements they use. They rescue souls from the abyss."—*Starck.*

Vers. 11, 12. Moral Barrenness and Fruitfulness. "1. Those places and persons to which the waters of the Sanctuary come, or coming do not heal, are designed to barrenness and destruction (ver. 11). 2. True Christians are fruitful (ver. 12). 3. The cause of fruitfulness is the doctrine and grace of the Gospel (ver. 12). 4. The holy examples of true saints are medicinal (ver. 12)."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 12. Never-ending Spring. "The text a promise and picture of a never-fading spring. Goodness and spiritual beauty are eternal. 1. The everlasting youthfulness of a Christly soul. 2. The everlasting fruitfulness of a Christly soul. 3. The explanation of the glorious phenomenon is in this—'Because their waters issued out of the sanctuary.' A sacred place, a pure sanctuary, a holy fountain where the soul may cleanse itself from the dust and stains of the world. Fruit for meat and leaves for medicine. A healthy inner life ensures a fruitful outer life. A Christly soul is always young and beautiful."—*Homiletic Monthly.*

— "The blessed growth close by the river of life. Evergreen leaves, yet not leaves merely, but also fruit! Thus it is with life from God's Sanctuary."—*Lange.*

HOMILETICS.

THE INHERITANCE OF THE GOOD.

(Vers. 13–23.)

I. Is secured by Divine promise (ver. 14). That promise was declared and ratified in the most solemn manner—"Concerning the which I lifted up Mine hand." Though the inheritance is not in possession, and all appearances are against the realisation of the promise, yet it is enough that the promise is made. Israel is kingless and portionless, bereft of Temple and all its imposing ceremonials, fretting in slavery and sorrow, moaning in poverty and ruin, and with no prospect of immediate deliverance, yet the inheritance is sure, for God hath promised. The Divine Word is more valid than the best-authenticated legal document.

II. Is explicitly defined (vers. 15–20). To show that it is no baseless hope, no Utopian dream, but a substantial, blessed reality. Its boundaries are clearly described and exactly measured to show that every inch of its frontiers is guarded with the presence and power of Jehovah, and to inspire an unwavering assurance of its realisation and enjoyment. The Lord deals in neither false measures nor false promises.

III. Is enjoyed by the obedient irrespective of nationality (vers. 21–23). The distinction between Jew and Gentile is abolished. The inheritance is made free for all nations. Whoever fears God and works righteousness unites himself to the true Israel, the perfect Church of the Messiah, shall enjoy the same privileges as the faithful and obedient descendants of Abraham. Tribes, classes, nations, are absorbed and lost in the spiritual unity of an imperishable brotherhood. Christ is all and in all.

LESSONS.—1. *The Divine promise never fails.* 2. *The faithful servants of Jehovah have a rich inheritance here and hereafter.* 3 *National strifes and jealousies will be unknown in the heavenly Kingdom.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 13–23. "A people settled in the inheritance of their God is the proper result of the re-establishment of the covenant and the renewal of their souls after its principles of righteousness. There is no more reason for understanding this portion according to the letter than those which went before. The whole vision is of a piece—a pictorial representation of the future things of God's Kingdom under the image of the past, yet so altered and adjusted as to indicate the vast superiority of what was to come compared with what hitherto had been."—*Fairbairn.*

— **The Heritage of the Faithful.** "1. Here we have the great extent of the Church under Christ. 2. The state of Christians in the Church and all their spiritual blessings are of free grace. 3. The one and same inheritance belongs to the believing Jew and Gentile."—*Greenhill.*

Vers. 13, 14. **The Divine Faithfulness**—"1. Is not impaired by the lapse of time, or by the fickleness of man. 2. Is solemnly declared. 'Concerning which I lifted up mine hand. 3. Seen in the kindness shown to succeeding generations. 'To give unto

your fathers: this land shall fall unto you for inheritance." 4. Should elicit an exclusive and unwavering confidence.

Ver. 13. "Who can define the boundaries of the Church, especially in the last days? But as here the boundaries of Canaan are defined, so the boundaries of the Church are faith and life in the Scriptures of the apostles and prophets, which accordingly no one is to overpass (Gal. vi. 16). God gives to His children very differently; from him to whom a double portion has been given a corresponding return is required."—*Starck.*

Vers. 22, 23. **The Impartiality of God**—1. Seen in His equitable treatment of the faithful in all ages and nations. 2. Is continually promoting the spiritual unity of the human race. 3. Will be terribly evident in His punishment of the finally impenitent.

Ver. 22. "It is not birth, but the new birth, that makes men children of God Here under earthly figures the Jerusalem that is above with her children is typified, and the calling of the Gentiles from east and west and the utmost bounds of the earth is described. God here opens to all the holy gates of His Church, and prescribes to the Church herself the commandment of meekness, love, and brotherly kindness."—*Lange.*

The Ideal Allotment of the Holy Land. (Chap. xlviii.)

EXEGETICAL NOTES. — The order of the original occupation of the Holy Land by the tribes under Joshua is partly, but only partly, followed. It is a new order of things, and its ideal character is evinced, as elsewhere, by exact and equal measurements. From north to south seven tribes succeed each other—Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, Judah, each occupying the full breadth of the land from east to west. Then comes a portion separated as an offering to the Lord, into (1) a northern portion for the Levites; (2) a central portion for the priests and the Temple; (3) a southern portion for the city and those who serve it. These three form a square which does not occupy the whole breadth of the land, but is flanked on either side, east and west, by portions assigned to the prince. Then follow, south of the city, five portions for the five remaining tribes—Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad—similar to those assigned to the seven. Thus the Levites, the Temple, and city are guarded by Judah and Benjamin, the two tribes who had throughout preserved their allegiance to the true sovereignty of Jehovah, and thus the plan expresses the presence of Jehovah among His people, summed up in the name of the city with which Ezekiel's prophecy closes, "The Lord is there."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 1. "A portion for Dan." Literally, *Dan one.* The same is repeated for each tribe, the usual mode in Hebrew of expressing distribution and implying equality in the portions. Dan, as morally semi-heathen, has the least honourable place in the extreme north.

Ver. 2. "Asher." No one of note in this tribe is mentioned in the Old Testament. The prophetess Anna belonged to it (Luke ii. 36).

Ver. 4. "A portion for Manasseh." The intercourse and unity between the two and a half tribes east of the Jordan and the nine and a half west of it had been kept up by the splitting of Manasseh, causing the visits of kinsmen one to the other from both sides of the Jordan. There shall be no need for this in the new order of things.

Ver. 5. "A portion for Ephraim." This tribe, with its two dependent tribes, Manasseh and Benjamin, for upwards of 400 years under the judges held the pre-eminence.

Ver. 6. "**A portion for Reuben**"—doomed formerly for incest and instability not to excel (Gen. xlix. 4). No distinguished prophet, priest, or king came from this tribe. To it belonged the mutinous Dathan and Abiram. A pastoral and Bedouin character marked it and Gad (Judges v. 16).

Ver. 15. "**The five thousand that are left.**" The remainder of the great square of 25,000 reeds from north to south. "**A profane place for the city**"—not strictly sacred as the sacerdotal portions, but applied to secular or common uses: so chap. xlii. 20.

Ver. 19. "**Out of all the tribes of Israel.**" Formerly the citizens of Jerusalem were out of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. Now all the tribes are to have an equal part in it, to avoid jealousies (2 Sam. xix. 43).

Ver. 23. "**Benjamin shall have a portion.**" This tribe alone with Judah had been throughout loyal to the house of David, so its prowess at the night of the national history was celebrated as well as in the morning.

Ver. 24. "**Simeon a portion.**" Simeon was omitted in the blessing of Moses (Deut. xxxiii.), perhaps because of the Simeonite prince who at Baalpeor led the Israelites in their idolatries with Midian (Num. xxv. 14).

Ver. 25. "**Issachar a portion**"—its ancient portion had been on the plain of Esdraelon. Compared (Gen. xlix. 14) to "a strong ass crouching between two burdens"—tribute and tillage; never meddling with wars except in self-defence.

Ver. 31. "**The gates of the city.**" The twelves gates bear the names of the twelve tribes, to imply that all are regarded as having an interest in it.

Ver. 35. "**The Lord is there.**" "The name of the city shall be no longer Jerusalem—*The vision of peace*—but Adonai-shama—*The Lord is there*—because Jehovah will never again withdraw from it as He once withdrew, but will hold it as His everlasting possession."—*Jerome.* Not that the city will be so called in mere name, but that the reality will be best expressed by this descriptive title (Jer iii. 17, xxxiii. 16; Zech. ii. 10; Rev xxi. 3, xxii. 3). A prophetic vision fulfilled in Emmanuel, *God with us*, who tabernacled among men (John i. 14).

HOMILETICS.

The Earthly Canaan a Type of the Heavenly.

(Vers. 1–35.)

In this closing chapter we have a condensed summary of the magnificent vision described in the previous chapters with such fulness and exactitude. Reviewing the gradual development of the prophecy, Ezekiel catches up its chief features and groups them in a pictorial form calculated to arrest the attention and keep alive the hope of God's people through the dreary years that followed. The lost land is restored and repeopled; from the ruins of the old Jerusalem rises a city exceeding in vastness and splendour the colossal buildings of antiquity; the Temple like a guardian angel occupies a lofty, central position, round which the current of city life and worship is continually circling, and from that Temple, like rays of golden light, the glory of the Divine presence is spread throughout the holy and happy land. The prophetic description suggests *the Earthly Canaan as a type of the Heavenly.*

I. In the significant position occupied by the Temple of Jehovah. "The Sanctuary in the midst" (vers. 8, 10, 21). To the pious Jew the Temple was the glory of Palestine, the all-prominent, central object, towards which his gaze was ever directed, and wherever he prayed his face was reverently turned towards the holy place. In the midst of the heavenly Canaan the Temple stands conspicuous. Worship is the delightful employment of the glorified, and the very essence of their individual bliss (Rev. v. 15).

II. In the spectacle it presents of a united spiritual brotherhood (ver. 29). The land was divided in equal portions among the tribes, and a holy oblation apportioned for the Temple, priests, Levites, prince, and people (vers. 9–22). There was no ground, nor was there any disposition, to indulge in the envyings and jealousies that had vexed and torn asunder the different tribes.

> "Antipathies are none. In the heart
> No passion touches a discordant string,
> But all is harmony and love."

The charm of heaven is its inviolable unity. Each heart is bound together by the cord of love, and the union is cemented and strengthened by the worship and service in which all have a common interest. The unifying power is ever present in the object of their constant praise. There the prayer of Jesus has its most sublime realisation (John xvii. 21–23).

III. **In the honourable position assigned to those who have been conspicuous for fidelity.** The tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who remained faithful to Jehovah when all the rest were renegade, have a place of honour in close proximity to the holiest—Judah on the north and Benjamin on the south of the portion of land specially dedicated to the Lord (vers. 7, 23). The priests, the sons of Zadok, who had kept the charge while the Levites went astray, are also generously remembered in the new order of things (ver. 11). Man loses nothing by making a resolute stand for truth and righteousness. He may sink in the estimation of the temporising and may suffer for his principles; but it is more disastrous to sink in his own estimation, and still more in the estimation of God: that would be to entail suffering from which there is no relief. The faithful champion for the truth shall have victory in this life and distinguished reward in the next (Rev. iii. 12; vii. 14–17).

IV. **In being presided over by the manifested glory of the Divine Presence.** "The Lord is there" (ver. 35). To the true Israelite the Temple of the earthly Canaan was a synonym for the Divine presence: there He dwelt, there He revealed His glory from between the cherubim, and thence He declared His law and governed His people. The light, the glory, the joy of heaven is the presence of the Divine King robed in peerless majesty and ever displaying the endless manifoldness of His matchless character. Its beauty, its splendour, its order, its purity, its ecstasy, are all summed up in the exulting fact—"*The Lord is there!*"

LESSONS.—1. *We learn that things earthly are the patterns of the heavenly.* 2. *In our darkest experiences we are cheered with the brightest visions of the future.* 3. *The supreme glory of heaven is a sight of the unveiled presence of Jehovah.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1–7. "The places of more or less honour assigned to each tribe are regulated by the degree of faithfulness to the Lord and His ordinances by

which the tribes severally were characterised. Thus Judah and Benjamin, the tribes which adhered longest to the ordinances of the Temple and to the house of David when the rest apostatised, shall hold the most honourable positions. Dan, on the contrary, is to have the least honourable place at the extreme north, as having been so early as the times of the Judges in a great degreee demoralised and heathenised. So in respect to the degrees of glory which await all the saints in the coming Kingdom of God, the measure of honour will be regulated by the measure of faithfulness. Herein believers have the strongest incentive not merely to work, but to abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. xv. 58)."—*Fausset.*

Vers. 8, 10, 21. "The Sanctuary in the midst." **The Centrality of the Church of God**—1. A special mark of the Divine honour and affection. 2. Indicates its supreme importance to the universe. 3. The choicest blessings emanate from and converge towards it. 4. It is the seat of Divine authority and power.

Ver. 8. "Thy heart is in thy midst; take heed to whom it belongs: is it a temple of God in which His Spirit dwells, or is it a habitation of unclean spirits? God has an eternal right to the centre of man. God is the centre of the spirit-world, and in Him everything lives and moves."—*Lange.*

Vers. 10–14. **God's care for His Servants.** 1. They shall have ample provision for all their needs (ver. 10). 2. He will specially reward those who have been faithful to Him in times of trial (vers. 11, 12). 3. Their possessions shall be permanent and secure (ver. 14).

Ver. 11. "To err with the erring excuses no one; the way is broad, not for us to walk on it, but to call attention to the narrow path of life."—*Starck.*

Ver. 13. "The priests had their lot near the Sanctuary, and the Levites had theirs in the centre of the tribes, that they might be ready for the service of God and for the instruction of the people. Hence the Lord, having made the priests His first care, expects that they should make the souls of the people their sole concern."—*Sutcliffe.*

Vers. 15–20, 30–35. **A Happy City**—1. Occupying a spacious area. 2. Commanding vast temporal resources. 3. Enjoying unexceptionable religious privileges. 4. Inhabited by a devout and contented people. 5. Providing ample facilities for ingress and egress. 6. A model of order, good government, unity, and peace.

Vers. 15–20. "The city was ample and glorious, being about nine miles from gate to gate and thirty-six miles in circumference. The unbelief of the Jews in our Lord's time was fostered by a literal interpretation of the prophecies which, under splendid figures taken from earthly scenes, shadowed forth that superior and spiritual empire which He came to establish, and their carnal hopes and prospects of temporal dominion and glory led to the rejection of the true Messiah. Nor is it much less delusive to expect a literal fulfilment of the predictions we have been contemplating, which would in effect be going back to that shadowy dispensation which the Gospel is intended to supersede, instead of advancing to that brighter and more spiritual glory to be revealed in the latter day, and would, instead of converting Jews to Christianity, bring back the Christian Church to a state of Judaism."—*Sutcliffe.*

Ver. 18. "Behold here the great goodness of God, who thinks of even the labourers in the city and cares for them. But every Christian ought to to be an upright labourer, as every stone, wherever it is placed, belongs to the building and contributes to its erection."—*Lange.*

Ver. 19. **Holy Citizens.** "1. The

citizens are holy men, not common, profane men; Israelites, not Gibeonites. 2. They are men chosen not out of one, but out of every tribe. 3. They are to be serviceable—to improve their talents for the good of the city."—*Greenhill.*

Ver. 20. "All our dealings must be square, or else we are not of the holy portion, of the New Jerusalem."—*Trapp.*

Vers. 23–34. "As in the great family of man not one face answers precisely to another, but each is distinguished by some peculiarity, so it is amongst the children of God: therefore, though the sons of Israel were so many, they had all their distinguishing names, to which doubtless the searcher of their hearts and the orderer of their lives saw something corresponding in their character and history. Here also we see that, whatever our place may be, it is ordered for us by God, as the lots of the tribes in the earth; that, however we may enter into the kingdom of heaven, the peculiarity of our character shall be regarded there, seeing the names of its gates are not one but many; that, whatever the history of our preparation for it be, suitable character of glory is provided for us there, since its gates open upon every quarter of the earth."—*M'Farlan.*

Ver. 23. "Let every man be content with the portion of temporal goods which he possesses, for the Lord has apportioned it (Matt. xx. 14)."—*Lange.*

Vers. 30–35. **The City of God**—1. Is well and strongly founded. 2. Is comely and beautiful. 3. Has access to it from all parts. 4. Its happiness from the Lord's inhabiting it.

— "The names of the twelve tribes are to be severally connected with the twelve gates of the city, for all alike shall have an interest in it in their respective places and situations. So the very humblest believer has his due place appointed to him in the heavenly city. That shall be a blessed change from the present scene of disorder and confusion to a world wherein all beneath God, from the highest to the lowest, know and keep their place in the most perfect harmony, love, and blessedness."—*Fausset.*

Ver. 35. "The glory and joy of heaven shall not be so much the absence of all present woes and the presence of all the other good things which God shall bestow, as it shall consist in this: the Lord Himself shall be there as the everlasting portion, joy, and light of His people."—*Fausset.*

— "That such scenes should have been described with such assured confidence and at a time so deeply overspread with gloom, was indeed an ennobling triumph of faith over sight. It gave a most illustrious proof of the height in spiritual discernment and far-seeing insight into the purposes of Heaven, which is sometimes imparted in the hour of greatest need, especially to the more select instruments of the Spirit's working. Here the heart of faith is taught never to despair, even in the darkest seasons. And when it is seen how much of the scheme delineated in the prophetic vision has already been accomplished, should not believers feel encouraged to look and strive for its complete realisation?"—*Fairbairn.*

— "Here endeth this remarkable vision, which, though greatly mystified by many of the attempts to explain it, stands forth to view on the sacred page as a noble specimen of Divine Wisdom, admirably calculated to inspire the captive exiles in Babylonia with the cheering hope of their resettlement in their own land and the restoration of their beloved metropolis and Temple. In contemplating it, the truly spiritually-minded Christian, with his thoughts raised above all earthly localities, will not perplex himself with subtle and trifling inquiries, but grasp the grand ideas which the vision suggests, and anticipate for himself in a future world a realisation of what was only dimly shadowed forth by that described."—*Henderson.*

HOMILETICS.

JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH: THE CITY OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE.

(Ver. 35.)

I. **An abode of impregnable safety.** "The Lord is there." He will be always there, never to desert it as He did the earthly Temple because of the sins of His people. It is sustained and defended at every point by His invincible power. The enemy assails in vain; no weapon can pierce the invulnerable defence. Evil cannot invade its holy precincts. Its inhabitants are for ever freed from the struggles and warfare with sin with which their earthly life has been harassed. The Divine Ruler governs with irresistible and loving authority, and the order and peace of the city remain for ever unbroken.

II. **An abode of unfading beauty and splendour.** "The Lord is there." The city shines with the reflected glory of His matchless perfections, and every part of the edifice is moulded into indescribable beauty and tipped with splendour. Perfection is the highest beauty. The Lord beautifies everything He touches. There is not a flower that blooms, a bird that flies, or a star that glitters but is adorned in every part of its wondrous structure with the reflected beauty of the Divine Artist. What, then, must be the inimitable beauty of the soul which, created in the Divine image, redeemed and transfigured by Divine love, is now admitted a citizen of the heavenly commonwealth, to bask for ever in the glory of the Divine presence?

III. **An abode of endlessly satisfying joy.** "The Lord is there." In His presence is fulness of joy (Ps. xvi. 11). The withdrawal of that presence is the soul's acutest misery, and is a catastrophe to be constantly deprecated (Ps. li. 11). The joy of earth is mingled with disappointment and distress; but in the city of the Divine presence no sorrow wrings the heart with anguish or brims the eyes with tears. The soul is satisfied for ever with the raptures of the ever-blessed God.

> "Let earth repent, and hell despair,
> This City has a sure defence:
> Her name is called 'The Lord is there,'
> And who has power to drive Him thence?"—*Cowper.*

REFLECTED RAYS FROM THE BEST LITERARY LIGHTS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE.

"The whole wondrous vision is only the picture of a condition of surpassing glory, expressed in imagery peculiar to the prophet. No one thinks of taking the almost parallel visions of St. John in the Apocalypse as literal descriptions. We do not expect to see the holy city, the New Jerusalem, actually coming down from God, out of heaven, nor that it will be literally four-square, with walls and gates like an ancient town, nor that the walls will be over 200 feet high, or the city itself 1500 miles square, or that its buildings and spires will rise 1500 miles into the air; and yet it must be done, if the description is to be understood otherwise than figuratively. To Ezekiel and St. John alike, the only aim was to convey the highest conception of magnificence as each imagined it most vividly presented. Living in the age of Rome and great provincial cities, St. John thinks of a New Jerusalem such as he describes

Imbued with a strongly Jewish and priestly bias, Ezekiel sees a glorious Temple rise before him, and all the details of a re-establishment of the Theocracy in Palestine, with transcendent splendour. To the mind of St. John, the Temple had ceased to be a central religious thought; in that of Ezekiel, the priest, it was supreme. In both, the inspired writer is left free to express the surpassing glory of the Messianic age in the only way possible to his modes of thought and the ideas of his age."—*Geikie's Hours with the Bible.*

"It was probably a Jubilee year when this vision was seen. The Temple and city were in ruins, but God was pleased in this way to revive the hopes of His people.

"Grotius and others have conceived that Ezekiel was simply guided to leave behind patterns on the basis of which the Temple should in after-days be rebuilt and its services restored. But an examination of the vision will show the insufficiency of this explanation. Not only was this plan never carried out, but it was, as Ezekiel must have known, incapable of execution. The physical features of the land would not admit of the separation of precincts a mile square, surrounded by a territory sixteen miles by forty-eight. The river, though connected with the stream brought by conduit-pipes into the actual Temple, soon passes into a condition wholly ideal, and the equal apportionment of the land to each of the twelve tribes is compatible neither with history nor geography. That the Temple and its services were symbolical of the Sacrifice and of the Priesthood of Christ the Epistle to the Hebrews sufficiently proves. The assemblage of the Christian Church around Christ as the central object of worship was that of which the assemblage of the people around the Temple was the type and representative; and it is more simple to understand the vision as portraying immediately the Church of Christ, than to refer to such a partial fulfilment as would give to the details an unreality discouraging to such as were looking to an actual rebuilding. But as the Jews already knew something of the typical character of the Temple services, this vision was intended to teach them more, and the very impossibility of realising its form was to draw them to the substance, and to give them prospects looking beyond any material reconstruction, just as Haggai consoled them for their disappointment at the erection of the second Temple by promises of spiritual glory.

"Others have looked upon the vision as purely allegorical, and disregarding its symbolical character, have interpreted it according to mere fancy. But many of the details had an actual existence in the original Temple, and some were exactly repeated, as though they were essential and not accidental.

"If we are surprised at the minuteness of the details, we must remember that it is of the essence of a vision that the seer has before him every line, as in a carefully drawn picture. In verbal illustration much is left undescribed, and the figures employed are often not carried out; but in a vision the seer at least has all before him, and it is the manner of Ezekiel to describe all he sees, and so to put his reader in the same position as himself. This may account for the insertion of details unimportant in themselves; but the numbers and figures employed are not without their meaning. Bähr has, in an elaborate treatise, shown that among the Eastern nations numbers and figures have ever had a highly symbolical character, and has applied such symbolism to the details of the Tabernacle and of the Temple. Without entering into particulars, we may remark that the symbolical numbers of the Temple of Solomon were repeated in the vision of Ezekiel, which reproduces with scrupulous accuracy the leading dimensions of the most holy part of the edifice, and, even where there are variations, employs constantly the same fundamental numbers and figures. Among the Hebrews the perfect figure was the square or the cube, and harmony was thought to be attained by exact equality, or

by the repetition of like dimensions. Thus in the ideal Temple, as in the real, we find the fundamental measure of 100 cubits square, which is maintained in the Temple-court and in the court of sacrifice.

"The vision is intended to depict the perpetual worship of the God of heaven in the Kingdom of Christ. To the mind of an Israelite the proper figure to represent this would be the Temple and its services, with people, priest, and prince each doing their fitting part.

"In other parts of this book Ezekiel points forward to the spiritual teaching of the Gospel; here to a people mourning over a ruined Temple, scattered priesthood, and a captive king, the seer sets forth in visions that which the last of the prophets foretold in words (Mal. i. 11). This will also account for the absence of all mention of the high priest and his office. In the old dispensation the chief function of the high priest was the performance of the great act which typified the atonement wrought by the sacrifice and death of Christ for the sins of the world. This atonement was effected once for all upon the Cross, and in the new dispensation Christ appears in the midst of His people as their Prince and Head, leading and presenting their prayers and praises day by day to His Father in heaven.

"It is to be observed that the vision represents the coming dispensation as a kingdom, and in this respect has especial reference to the rule of Messiah, foretold under the name of David. We find that Solomon took a special part in the Temple-services as king, and here there are new and remarkable provisions for the prince; and thus is brought forth, as a leading feature in the vision, the figure of a king reigning in righteousness, the representative of Jehovah upon earth."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

"The description of the Temple does not correspond with the plan of the Tabernacle, or that of the first Temple. These were real buildings, and were erected according to the patterns shown by God Himself to Moses and to David; but this is an ideal communicated, not to a leader or king in order to be actually carried out, but to a seer, who wrote down his vision for the consolation of the captives of Babylon. It cannot even have been meant that this ideal structure should have been built by the Jews after the return from captivity, or at any subsequent period. The dimensions of the Temple, as given in the vision, are greater than the entire ancient city of Jerusalem. The dimensions assigned to the city are as great as the whole of Palestine between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, and could not be placed on a square centring at Mount Zion without covering part of that sea. Plainly the Temple is ideal, and so is the city. The vision was given to keep before the minds of the exiles the duty of rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple on their restoration to their own land. The stupendous scale of the vision was, we presume, intended to project the thoughts of devout readers into far-distant times—not the times of the present Church of God, but those of the future glory and blessing on the earth, centring at Zion and Jerusalem, when the Lord shall be King over all the earth, and the Holy City shall be named Jehovah-Shammah, 'The Lord is there.'"—*Donald Fraser, D.D.*

"That there be things hard to be understood in the Sacred Scriptures these nine last chapters, as well as the beginning of Ezekiel, do abundantly testify; and such difficult things are in these last that they have made many men of the greatest parts to tremble at the thought of interpreting them. The Rabbins say that the first of Ezekiel and these last chapters are inexplicable secrets, and understood by none, and therefore forbid their disciples to read them; adding, when Elias shall come he will explain all things. Jerome, that great light in his time, professes his trepidation hereat, that he did knock at a closed

door. Gregory the Great, when he went about this work, said, 'We pursue a midnight journey.' Maldonate affirms that this last prophecy of Ezekiel is so difficult and dark that it appears scarcely possible to be understood. Œcolampadius tells us that in chapter xlii. there is the grand difficulty which ancient expositors understood not; and he brings in Rabbi Solomon, who wrote upon the whole Talmud, saying that he thinks there is not anything extant which aids the understanding of it; and professes that neither by his own study, aid of ministers, nor by his own reading, he attained any help in understanding the meaning of this building, but only what he had from heaven: and of himself he saith, chap. xlv., 'In this passage, above all others, I feel the weakness of my own understanding, yet silently I adore its mysteries. It is good to tremble at the Word of God, both what we understand and what we understand not; for all is of equal authority, and to him that trembles thereat the Lord looketh, and will let in light. The vision is dark, but God dwells in darkness; the Temple and city are dark, but Jehovah-Shammah, 'The Lord is there,' whom we most humbly desire to let out some beams of light, whereby we may come to understand something of the incredible sweetness of these dark and deep things.

"This vision, therefore, points out the introduction of a better hope, viz., the Church of Christ under the Gospel. A. Lapide tells us that many Rabbins and Jews refer this Temple and city to the Messiah, expecting that He should build them; and because this third Temple and new city are not yet built they think the Messiah is not yet come. That which the vision doth chiefly hold out unto us is, the building of the Christian Temple, with the worship thereof, under Jewish expressions which began to be accomplished in the apostles' days. And that the spiritual Temple, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles, is chiefly intended we may see from that correspondency between Ezekiel and John in his Gospel and Revelation."—*Greenhill.*

"The import of the vision in the main is this: that God would in due time accomplish the restoration of His exiled people to the land of their fathers, effect the reconstruction of their ruined Temple and reorganisation of its religious services, and bless them with manifest tokens of His favour. At the time it was granted, the Hebrews were in a state of the lowest depression in Babylon.

"Fourteen years had elapsed since the destruction of their sacred edifice, and nothing could have been better calculated to revive their drooping hopes, reinvigorate their confidence in their Covenant-God, and encourage them to return to Palestine when the hour of their liberation should arrive, than the brilliant prospect of the restoration of their civil and religious privileges, which the prophet here holds out to their view.

"Let now any reader of ordinary intelligence turn up the description of the vision, and let him be asked what is the impression which it naturally makes upon him, and which he finds it impossible to dismiss from his mind, and he will candidly own that it is that of a literal Temple. With respect to the waters, chap. xlvii., it is altogether different. Here there was nothing left for the Jews to do in bringing about the realisation of the vision. Having left the Temple, the seat of the Divine residence, and the source whence blessings were to flow to the restored Hebrew nation, the prophet is carried in vision southwards into the regions of the Dead Sea, which had been noted for everything that was forbidden and noxious in its aspect—the very embodiment of barrenness and desolation. These were now to be converted into fertility and beauty. As in the previous condition they were strikingly symbolical of the spiritually unproductive and abhorrent character of idolatrous Israel, so they were now to serve as images of the renewed state of things when God should bring back His

people, and, according to His promises, bless them by conferring upon them abundantly the rich tokens of His regard. By the copious effusions of the influences of His Holy Spirit, He would restore His Church to spiritual life, and render her instrumental in diffusing blessings to the world around.

"The only apparently plausible objection that can be taken to the literal interpretation of the Temple is founded on the dimensions assigned to it. It remains, however, to be settled whether reeds be the measure intended, and whether the language be not susceptible of another construction. Nor is there any inconsistency in interpreting one part of the vision literally and the other symbolically. The cases are perfectly different. In the one a literal Temple was required to meet the circumstances of the exiled Hebrews; in the other, though outwardly restored, the Temple and Temple-worship would still have left them in a state of spiritual destitution, if they had not received the blessing from on high. The rich and abundant communication of this blessing we conceive to be beautifully set forth under the image of a river issuing forth from the Divine presence in the new Temple, and, increasing as it flows in the direction of the Dead Sea, spreading life and fertility wherever it comes." —*E. Henderson, D.D.*

"If any one will take up the full circuit of the wall that encompassed the holy ground, according to our English measure it will amount to half a mile and about one hundred and sixty-six yards. And whosoever, likewise, will measure the square of Ezekiel (chap. xlii. 20), he will find it six times as large as this (chap. xl. 5), the whole amounting to three miles and a half and about one hundred and forty yards—a compass incomparably larger than Mount Moriah divers times over; and by this very thing is shown that that is spiritually and mystically to be understood.

"The description of the Temple and city that he hath given in the end of his book, as it was a prediction of some good to come, so was that prediction true, thus far according to the very letter—namely, that there should be a Temple and a city newly built; and so it was a promise and a comfort to the people then in captivity of their restoring again to their own land, and their enjoying Jerusalem and the Temple again as they had done in former time before their removing and captivating out of their own country. But as for a literal respondency of that city and Temple to all the particulars of his description, it is so far from it that his temple is delineated larger than all the earthly Jerusalem, larger than all the land of Canaan. And, thereby, the scope of the Holy Ghost in that ichnography (ground-plot) is clearly held out to be, to signify the great enlarging of the spiritual Jerusalem and Temple, the Church under the Gospel, and the spiritual beauty and glory of it, as well as to certify captived Israel of hopes of an earthly city and Temple to be rebuilt; which came to pass upon their return under Cyrus."—*Lightfoot.*

"The general scope of the vision may be twofold. 1. To assure the captives that they should not only return to their own land and be settled there, which had been often promised in the foregoing chapters, but that they should have, and therefore ought to be encouraged to build, another Temple, which God would own, and where He would meet and bless them; that the ordinances of their worship should be revived, and the sacred priesthood should there attend; and though they should not have a king to live in such splendour as formerly, yet they should have a prince or ruler that should countenance the Word of God among them, and should himself be an example of a diligent attendance upon it; and that prince, priests, and people should have a very comfortable settlement in their own land. 2. To direct them to look further than all this, and to expect the coming of the Messiah, who had before been prophesied of

under the name of David (the man that projected the building of the first Temple), and who should set up a spiritual Temple, even the Gospel Church, the glory of which should far exceed that of Solomon's Temple, and which should continue to the end of time. And the Gospel Temple, erected by Christ and His apostles, was so closely connected with the second material Temple, and was erected so carefully just at the time when that Temple fell into decay, being designed to receive its glories when it resigned them, that it was proper enough that they should both be referred to in one and the same vision; which vision, under the type and figure of a Temple and altar, priests and sacrifices, foreshowed the spiritual worship that should be performed in Gospel times, and that worship perfected at last in the kingdom of glory, in which, doubtless, these visions will have their full accomplishment; if not, as some think, in a glorious and happy state of the Gospel Church to take place on earth in latter days."—*Benson.*

"It is a great thought which presents itself unadorned to our view in the prophetico-symbolic Temple: God henceforth dwells in perfect peace, revealing Himself in the unbounded fulness of His glory, making Himself known in the living Word of progressive, saving, and sanctifying redemption. Everything is placed upon the ample circuit of the Temple, whose extended court receives all people, and through whose high and open gates the King of Glory is to enter in (Ps. xxiv. 7–9), and then upon the order and harmony of the Divine habitations, the well-proportioned building (chap. xlii. 10); and the revelations of the holiest are stored up in the pure deep water of His Word, which in life-giving streams issues from the Temple. The stone tables of the Law are consumed, and the fresh and free fountain of eternal truth streams forth from the Temple of the Spirit, quickening and vivifying in land and sea, awakening by its creative and fructifying power a new and mighty race on earth. And thus hast thou, much-misjudged yet lofty seer, in the unconscious depth of thy mysteriously flowing language, set up upon the great undistinguishing, well-proportioned, and beautifully compacted building a type of the simple yet lofty Temple of Christ, from which flows the spiritual fountain of life."—*Umbreit.*

"The ideal Temple exhibits, not the precise literal outline, but the essential character of the worship of Messiah as it shall be when He shall exercise sway in Jerusalem among His own people, the Jews, and thence to the ends of the earth. A Temple with sacrifices now would be a denial of the all-sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ. He who sacrificed before, confessed the Messiah; He who should sacrifice now would solemnly deny Him. These difficulties, however, may be all seeming, not real. Faith accepts God's Word as it is, waits for the event, sure that it will clear up all such difficulties. Perhaps, as some think, the beau-ideal of a sacred commonwealth is given according to the then-existing pattern of Temple-services, which would be the imagery most familiar to the prophet. The minute particularising of details is in accordance with Ezekiel's style, even in describing purely ideal scenes. The old Temple embodied, in visible forms and rites, spiritual truths affecting the people, even when absent from it. So this ideal Temple is made, in the absence of the outward Temple, to serve by description the same purpose of symbolical instruction as the old literal Temple did by forms and acts. As in the beginning God promised to be a Sanctuary to the captives at the Chebar, so now at the close is promised a complete restoration and realisation of the theocratic worship and polity under Messiah, in its noblest ideal (Jer. xxxi. 38–40). Israel's province may hereafter be to show the essential identity, even in the minute details of the Temple-sacrifices, between the Law and Gospel (Rom. x. 4, 8). The ideal of the theocratic Temple will then first be realised."—*Fausset.*

"As to the Messianic character of the substance of this whole vision Jewish and Christian commentators are generally agreed; and the opinion which, according to Jerome, many of the Jews entertained, and which has been supported by the rationalistic expositors after the example of Grotius—namely, that Ezekiel describes the Temple of Solomon destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar as a model for the rebuilding of it after the return of the Jews from the captivity—has not found much favour, inasmuch as, apart from all other objections to which it is exposed, it is upset by the fact that not only are its supporters unable to make anything of the description of the spring which issues from the threshold of the Temple, but they are also unable to explain the separation of the Temple from the city of Jerusalem; as it would never have occurred to any Jewish patriot, apart from Divine revelation, much less to a priest like Ezekiel, who claims such important prerogatives for the prince of the family of David in relation to the Temple, to remove the house of Jehovah from Mount Zion, the seat of the royal house of David, and out of the bounds and territory of the city of Jerusalem. But even if we lay aside this view, and the one related to it, viz., that the whole vision contains nothing more than ideal hopes and desires of better things belonging to that age, with regard to the future restoration of the destroyed Temple and kingdom, the commentators, who acknowledge the Divine origin of prophecy and the Messianic character of the vision, differ very widely from one another with reference to the question how the vision is to be interpreted; some declaring themselves quite as decidedly in favour of the literal explanation as others in favour of the figurative or symbolico-typical view, which they regard as the only correct and Scriptural one."—*Keil.*

"According to some we have here 'a model, according to which, on the return of the people, the Temple should have been rebuilt,'—a building specification by Divine authority. But this opinion forgets that we have here to do not with an architect but with a prophet—with one whose department is not the hands but the hearts, which he has to awaken to faith and hope. It cannot produce a single analogy from the prophetic region: nowhere have the prophets intruded into the department of legislation, for which under the old covenant other organs were provided. Especially all the other prophecies of Ezekiel of the time after the destruction bear not a legislative but a hortatory character. In particular, the adjoining prophecy concerning Gog and Magog leads us to expect that here also much will belong to mere pictorial description, which is excluded if we ascribe a legislative import to the section. To this is added the obvious impossibility of erecting a building according to the specifications given. These suffice only to give play to the imagination. We have in particular almost nothing of materials, to which so much space is devoted in the description of Solomon's Temple. As a rule, the specifications are confined to the mere measures and distances; whence those who, like Villalpandus, have undertaken to give literal plans of Ezekiel's Temple have been obliged to draw much from their own fancy. Lastly, in the building of the second Temple, it is manifest that no reference is made to Ezekiel's Temple. As the reason of this cannot be sought in any doubt of the Divine mission of Ezekiel, whose prophecies were admitted into the canon, it can only be found in this, that men saw in this prophecy something else than a building specification. The restoration of the city and the Temple rests on the ground of the firm conviction of the living power and indestructibility of the Kingdom of God, the symbol of which was the Temple, according to a view pervading the whole of the Old and New Testament. And as the prophecy reaches beyond its first fulfilment, it guarantees that within the Kingdom of God life shall arise out of every death—that the old covenant cannot go down without rising again gloriously in the new."—*Hengstenberg.*

"What is this Temple? The first obvious suggestion is, that Ezekiel was looking forward to the times of Ezra; that this Temple is an anticipation of that of which Zerubbabel brought forth the headstone. But the building which rises before the eyes of the seer covers an area which the second Temple never can have occupied. In Ezekiel's vision there is a distinct allusion to that appearance of the glory of the Lord which belonged, the Jews say, exclusively to the elder building. Christian writers have availed themselves of these circumstances to decide peremptorily that the vision is of a spiritual, not an earthly Temple. The difficulties in the way of such an opinion are very great. Accurate admeasurements in feet and cubits seem as if they must relate to a visible, not to an invisible fabric. There are still two possible opinions. One is popular among many of our countrymen. It is, that a Temple exactly answering to Ezekiel's description will appear hereafter in Jerusalem. The other, that Ezekiel carried with him into Chaldea the habits, the prejudices, and formality of the priestly order to which he belonged. Therefore, though he had high moral purposes and divine instincts, he could not but regard the reappearance of a Temple like that which Nebuzaradan had destroyed, only more magnificent, as the consummation of an Israelite's dreams and hopes.

"But where did the prophet get these measures? To what did they correspond? There cannot be the slightest doubt, I conceive, that the general form and construction of the building, the different parts of which it was to consist, the cherubim and palm-trees which were to adorn it, were suggested to him by that which he had actually seen. If he taught that the future was to be unlike the past, that there was no common root out of which they both grew, he would be faithless to his vocation, he would be forgetting the permanent and eternal Being. Solomon's Temple had been Ezekiel's primer or first lesson-book. I have anticipated what I have to say to those who maintain that Ezekiel is giving us the pattern of a Temple made of living stones, not of stones hewn out of an earthly quarry. By a spiritual Temple they do not, I trust, mean an unsubstantial Temple, one built of clouds and mists, one erected by the eye which sees it. They believe, doubtless, the spiritual temple to be a spiritual society, possessing a real unity inhabited by the Divine Presence resting on the Divine Name. Well, I do not doubt that Ezekiel saw more or less clearly the pattern in earthly forms. But we must remember, first, not to confound the pattern with the earthly forms which set it forth; secondly, we must assure ourselves that whatever is spiritual and substantial will seek to find some expression for itself, to make the things of earth into mirrors which may reflect at least a portion of its glory. In chap. xlvi. 8 we have announced a great moral and political law which was a necessary and natural corollary from the doctrine that the Temple was to be the building which denoted the restoration of the national society. This is a law which those who merely talk of a spiritual Temple without believing that that Temple is to make its influence felt in this world would never dream of promulgating. This is a law which it was most strictly in the function of a Jewish prophet to assert, not as proceeding from him, not even as proceeding from Moses, but as coming from the mouth of the Lord."—*F. D. Maurice.*

"The views entertained upon the vision generally may be ranged under four classes. I. *The historico-literal*, which takes all as a prosaic description of what had existed in the times immediately before the captivity, in connection with Solomon's Temple. II. *The historico-ideal.* According to it the pattern exhibited to Ezekiel differed materially from anything that previously existed, and presented for the first time what *should have been* after the return from the captivity, though from the remissness and corruption of the people it never was properly realised. III. *The Jewish carnal view.* It is the opinion of some Jewish writers that the description of Ezekiel was actually followed by the

children of the captivity as far as their circumstances would allow, and that Herod, when he renovated and enlarged it, copied after the same pattern. But as this was necessarily done in an imperfect manner, it waits to be properly accomplished by the Messiah, who, when He appears, shall cause the Temple to be reared precisely as here described. IV. *The Christian-spiritual* or typical view, according to which the whole representation was not intended to find either in Jewish or Christian times an express and formal realisation, but was a grand complicated symbol of the good which God had in reserve for His Church, especially under the coming dispensation of the Gospel. There are several considerations to be kept in view in the interpretation of the vision. 1. That the description purports to be a vision—a scheme of things exhibited to the mental eye of the prophet in the visions of God. This alone marks it to be of an ideal character. 2. That this is confirmed by the substance of it, as there is much that seems obviously designed to force on us the conviction of its ideal character. There are things in the description which, taken literally, are in the highest degree improbable, and even involve natural impossibilities. 3. That some may be disposed to imagine that, as they expect certain physical changes to be effected upon the land before the prophecy can be carried into fulfilment, these may be adjusted in such a manner as to admit of the prophet's measurements being literally applied. It is impossible, however, to admit such a supposition. 4. That the vision, as it must, if understood literally, imply the ultimate restoration of the ceremonials of Judaism, so it inevitably places the prophet in direct contradiction to the writers of the New Testament. 5. That, holding the description to be conclusively of an ideal character, we affirm that the idealism is precisely of the same kind as that which appeared in some of the earlier visions—visions that must necessarily have already passed into fulfilment, and which therefore may justly be regarded as furnishing a key to the right understanding of the one before us. 6. That, looking to the manifold and minute particulars given in the description, some may be disposed to think it highly improbable that anything short of an exact and literal fulfilment should have been intended. 7. That it may be asked whether the feeling against a spiritual understanding of the vision and a demand for outward scenes and objects literally corresponding to it does not spring to a large extent from false notions regarding the ancient Temple and its ministrations and ordinances of worship, as if these possessed an independent value apart from the spiritual truths they symbolically expressed? On the contrary, the Temple, with all that belonged to it, was an embodied representation of Divine realities. 8. That in the interpretation of the vision we must keep carefully in mind the circumstances in which it was given, and look at it, not as from a New but as from an Old Testament point of view. We must throw ourselves back as far as possible into the position of the prophet himself. He speaks chiefly of Gospel times, but as one still dwelling under the veil and uttering the language of legal times."—*Patrick Fairbairn, D.D.*

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